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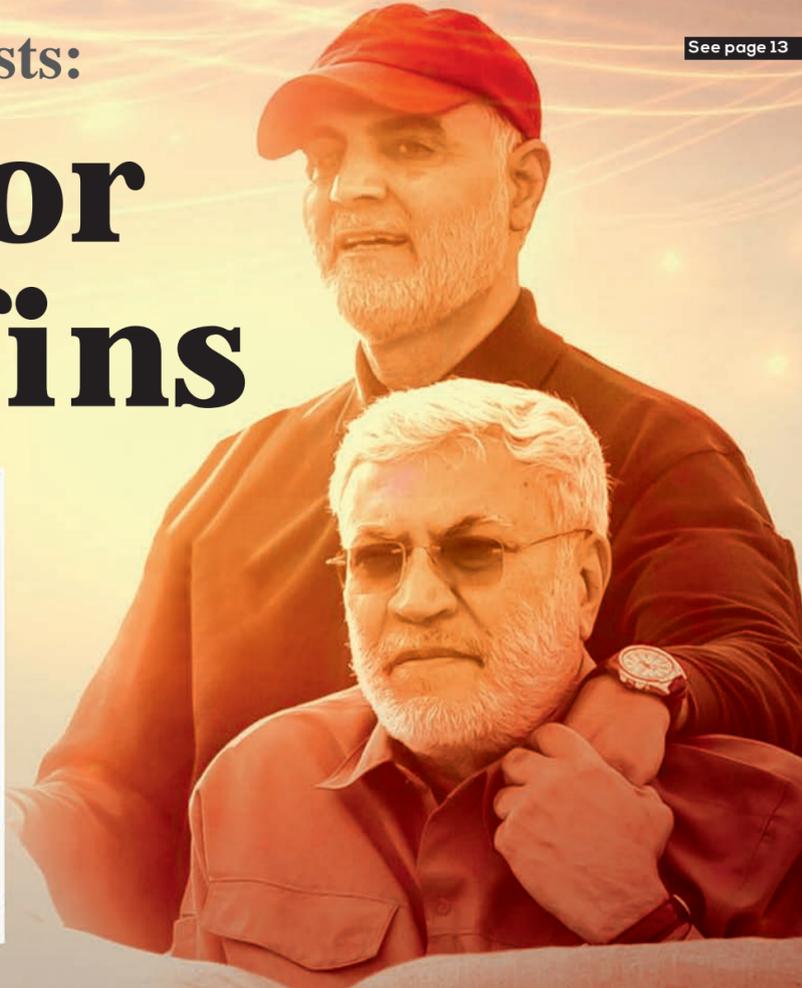


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Nasrallah to U.S. terrorists:

Go home or sent in coffins

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Iraqi parliament passes resolution on U.S. troop withdrawal

Iraqi parliament has voted to have foreign troops removed from the country, heeding to a call from its caretaker prime minister. The move comes after US assassination of a top Iranian general and a commander of Iraqi militia. →13

End of U.S. malign presence in West Asia has begun: Zarif

TEHRAN — Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Sunday that end of the United States' "malign presence" in West Asia has begun.

"Whether kicking or screaming, end of US malign presence in West Asia has begun," Zarif said in a tweet.

Zarif also condemned U.S. President Donald Trump's threats of targeting 52 Iranian sites, including cultural ones, reminding him that targeting cultural sites is an instance of "war crime". →2

World reacts to Trump's threat to raid Iranian culture targets as 'a war crime'

By Afshin Majlesi
TEHRAN — Donald Trump's new threat to attack 52 important targets in Iran, including cultural sites, has provoked a strong backlash worldwide, with many calling it a "war crime."

On Saturday, the U.S. president said on Twitter that his military would strike "very important" targets related to Iran if the Iranians attempted to take retaliatory action against the U.S. for the assassination of a senior military commander in the Iraqi capital Baghdad early on Friday. →10

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

By Payman Yazdani
TEHRAN (MNA) — Chair of the Centre for Iranian Studies at the London Middle East Institute says General Soleimani played a pivotal role in combatting terror movements such as Daesh, both in terms of military strategy and ideological outreach. Whereas the role of the United States and other regional actors such as Saudi Arabia has been ambiguous.

General Qassem Soleimani who was martyred by a U.S. airstrike ordered by President Donald Trump at Baghdad International Airport on

Friday, was hailed as a charismatic brave hero in Iran and beloved by the troops. Once, Iran's leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, called him a "living martyr".

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

Many believe that Soleimani was not only a national hero for Iranian people but also he was a person who played a significant role in

defeating ISIL which is a real threat for the region and even for Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia. He also had a great role in confronting the U.S. regional policy and plans aiming at redesigning the map of countries in the Middle East.

Following his martyrdom, we discussed the role of General Soleimani in tackling the U.S. and Saudi backed ISIL threat in the region with Professor Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, Chair of the Centre for Iranian Studies at the London Middle East Institute. →11

Johnson faces heat for silence on Iran while on holiday

Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson is due to return Sunday to the UK, where he faces criticism for not cutting short his holiday to deal with soaring Mideast tensions.

Johnson, who celebrated the New Year on the Caribbean private island of Mustique after leading his Conservative Party to a strong majority in the Dec. 12 election, has been silent over the U.S. slaying Friday of Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani in a drone strike.

Soleimani's death stoked fears that heightened

world tensions could spiral into war after Iran threatened revenge against the U.S., which has sent 3,000 more soldiers to Kuwait. British Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab has defended Johnson, saying the two have been in constant contact during this time.

The British government has upgraded its travel warning for the Middle East and dispatched two warships to escort UK-flagged ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz, a key shipment corridor for world oil supplies.

Jeremy Corbyn, the outgoing leader of the

opposition Labor party, said Johnson "should have immediately cut short his holiday to deal with an issue that could have grave consequences for the U.K. and the world." In an op-ed in The Observer, Labor's foreign policy spokeswoman Emily Thornberry, who is in the race to take over from Corbyn, said she was astonished Johnson hadn't said anything 48 hours after the strike and wondered if he was afraid of angering U.S. President Donald Trump, who ordered the slaying. (Source: AP)

At least 30 killed in Libya military academy attack

At least 30 people were killed and 33 others wounded in an attack on a military academy in the Libyan capital late on Saturday, the health ministry of the Tripoli-based government said in a statement on Sunday. Tripoli, controlled by the internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA), is facing an offensive by military commander Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) that began in April.

There has been an increase in air strikes and shelling around Tripoli in recent weeks, with fears that fighting could escalate further after Turkey's parliament voted to allow a troop deployment in support of the GNA.

Forces allied with the GNA described Saturday's attack on the military camp at Al-Hadhba as "an aerial bombing" launched by their eastern rivals. An LNA spokesman denied involvement. GNA Health Minister Hamid bin Omar told Reuters

earlier in a phone call that the number of dead and wounded was still rising. Tripoli ambulance service spokesman Osama Ali said some body parts could not be immediately counted by forensic experts.

Earlier, the ambulance service appealed for a temporary ceasefire to allow its crews to retrieve the bodies of five civilians killed on As Sidra Road in southern Tripoli and to evacuate families. (Source: Reuters)



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'General of the Hearts' honored from southwest to northeast

TEHRAN — Millions of angry mourners from all walks of life participated in separate funeral ceremonies held in the southwestern city of Ahvaz and the northeastern city of Mashhad on Sunday for Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani who was martyred in a U.S. air raid in Baghdad on Friday morning.

The funeral processions to honor the IRGC Quds Force chief first started in the city of Ahvaz early on Sunday, hours after his remains arrived from Iraq. →2

EDITORIAL

Mohammad Ghaderi
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Hegemons' media warfare to complete the Soleimani assassination project

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

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

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

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

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

The undeniable crime by the U.S. in fact amounted to "state terrorism". The Americans have proven that they are the leading element of state terrorism at regional and international level. →13

ARTICLE

Morteza Helali
Mehr News Agency
journalist

Is there going to be a war between Hezbollah and Tel Aviv?

Lebanon and Palestine share a 79-kilometer-long border that has suffered from tensions at different times due to the Zionist regime's expansionist policies. Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, was not the end of its aggression in the border areas with Lebanon, as it still has occupied parts of the country.

While Zionist Regime's officials, especially Foreign Minister Israel Katz and Defense Minister Naftali Bennett, launches rhetoric against Iran and the Lebanese resistance, its top military and security sources are highly concerned about any war with Hezbollah.

The Zionists' endless fear of the power of the Lebanese resistance

In a recent position, a military analyst at the Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth reported that Lebanon's Hezbollah has become more powerful over the past decades because of Israel's failure and weakness, and now owns 150,000 missiles.

The analyst added that the regime must now establish peace on the southern borders and prepare itself for military operations on the northern borders.

The analyst also said, "Hezbollah is now capable of launching 1500 or even more missiles a day at Israel and easily capture Israeli settlements on the northern borders. We should be prepared for possible conflict that may occur at any moment. Israel is going through a difficult phase".

The Commander-in-Chief of the Israel Defense Rav Aluf Aviv Kochavi stated, "Peace with Hamas is a strategic necessity so that the Israeli army can confront the imminent danger by Hezbollah from the north".

Israeli General: Israel is not ready for war

Retired Israeli General Yitzhak Brick affirmed that the Zionist regime army is not ready for war at all, insisting that the regime has been threatening by hundreds of Iranian missiles in the region.

Brick claimed that the Israeli army lacked a security doctrine, stating that one is preparing the army for two fronts and the other is supplying hundreds of tanks, and it is unclear what is the job of the security cabinet in this situation? →13

Ayatollah Sistani condoles Ayatollah Khamenei over General Soleimani's martyrdom

POLITICAL TEHRAN — In a message to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Sunday, top Iraqi cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani expressed condolences over the martyrdom of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.



It is said in the message that Soleimani's sacrifices in "fighting Daesh will not be forgotten".

Lieutenant General Soleimani was assassinated in a United States' airstrike in Baghdad on Friday morning.

General Soleimani was a legendary commander in the fight against terrorists aligned to Daesh, al-Qaeda, al-Nusra, and others.

Rouhani urges regional countries to unitedly condemn U.S. criminal act

POLITICAL TEHRAN — President Hassan Rouhani has urged the regional countries to unitedly condemn the United States' action in assassinating Iranian Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

"We expect friendly and neighboring governments to unitedly condemn this criminal and devil action," he said in a phone conversation with President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani.

Rouhani said, "The Islamic Republic of Iran has never started aggression and tension."

For his part, Ghani expressed condolences over martyrdom of General Soleimani.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif also held phone conversations with Lebanese, Pakistani and Kazakh counterparts to discuss regional developments.



Pompeo indirectly confirms Israel's involvement in assassinating General Soleimani

POLITICAL TEHRAN — U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has indirectly confirmed involvement of the Zionist regime of Israel in assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani was assassinated in a U.S. airstrike in Baghdad on Friday.

"I am always grateful for Israel's steadfast support in defeating terrorism. The bond between Israel and the United States is unbreakable," Pompeo said in a tweet on Saturday.

Contrary to claims by the U.S., Israel and some vassal states in the region, General Soleimani was a legendary commander in the fight against terrorists aligned to Daesh, al-Qaeda, al-Nusra, and others.

In a message to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, top Iraqi Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani General Soleimani's endeavors in "fighting Daesh will not be forgotten".

Retired U.S. general: American forces in Iraq vulnerable to possible attacks by Iran

The U.S. forces in Iraq are not powerful enough to repel any possible attacks, a retired U.S. army general said following assassination of Iran's Quds Force commander by U.S. troops on Friday and Tehran's immediate promise of revenge.

Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani was martyred in a U.S. airstrike at Baghdad's international airport on Friday morning. The U.S. airstrike also martyred Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy commander of Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMU) and some other forces of the PMU along with their guests.

"The Iranians have a tactical advantage on the ground, so one brigade of the 82nd is not even remotely capable of defending our position in Iraq," General Barry McCaffrey warned on Friday.

It was a "major turning point", McCaffrey told MSNBC.

"[President Donald] Trump tweeting out an American flag, taking personal responsibility for it, escalates the situation in a very dangerous manner. I don't think they thought through it," he continued, noting there is very little structural support in Iraq for American troops to rely on.

"The embassy is clearly vulnerable," McCaffrey said.

"Our advantage is strategic air and naval power," he said, adding, "But it means attacking Iran directly."

"So I think the Iranians are going to respond in some way and if it's a successful and striking attack on U.S. interests or senior military leaders, I would anticipate the Persian Gulf War will begin anew," McCaffrey added.

The Pentagon had announced earlier that General Soleimani was killed on Trump's order.

According to the New York Times, the top Iranian general was killed when an American MQ-9 Reaper drone fired missiles into a convoy that was leaving the airport.

The strike was a serious escalation of Trump's growing confrontation with Tehran, which began almost a week ago when U.S. forces conducted drone strikes on locations of the PMU forces in Iraq, killing at least 25 individuals and leaving another 51 injured.

On Saturday, President Hassan Rouhani said Iran would definitely take revenge on the U.S. for killing General Soleimani.

"Vengeance for killing General Soleimani is an inalienable right for the Iranian people," Rouhani said while meeting Soleimani's family on Saturday morning.

'General of the Hearts' honored from southwest to northeast



Funeral procession for General Soleimani in Ahvaz

1 → The mourners dressed in black were holding flags in green, white and red - depicting the blood of "martyrs", while others held portraits of the assassinated legendary commander.

The U.S. airstrike also killed Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy commander of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMU). Both Soleimani and Muhandis were popular figureheads in helping squelch an ominous rise of Daesh which once came as close as 30 km to Baghdad, while the U.S. withdrew troops from Iraq and looked on.

On Sunday afternoon, hundreds of thousands of people attended the mourning procession of General Soleimani in the shrine city of Mashhad.

People, including the young, old, men, and women, flocked to the city of Mashhad

from different cities of Khorassan Razavi province to bid farewell to Soleimani, who has been called "the General of the Hearts".

Brigadier General Esmaeil Qa'ani, the newly-appointed commander of the IRGC Quds Force, addressed the elaborate funeral procession in Mashhad.

A similar huge funeral ceremonies were held in the Iraqi cities of Kadhimiya, Baghdad, Karbala and Najaf for General Soleimani and Muhandis. Iraqi dignitaries including Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi participated in the funeral procession in Baghdad.

Observers say Iraqis' massive turnout in the Saturday funeral is both a testimony to Soleimani's popularity among many Iraqis and a message to the U.S. which made its stay in the Arab country more unwelcome



Funeral procession for General Soleimani in Mashhad

with the extrajudicial killing.

The Iraqi parliament voted on Sunday for a resolution to ask the government to end the agreement to host U.S. troops in Iraq.

Prime Minister Abdul-Mahdi also told parliament that Soleimani was due to meet him the day he was assassinated and deliver a response from the Iranians to a Saudi message which could have led to a de-escalation of tensions in the region, according to Reuters news agency.

Iraqi officials have also summoned the U.S. envoy to Iraq, Matthew Tueller, over the airstrikes. "[The airstrikes] were a blatant violation of Iraqi sovereignty," the Iraqi foreign ministry said in a statement, and "contradict the agreed-upon missions of the international coalition."

Iraq's Foreign Ministry also lodged an

official complaint with the UN Secretary General and Security Council over the U.S. air strikes on Sunday.

Prime Minister Abdul-Mahdi, who was in attendance in parliament on Sunday, urged parliament to end the presence of foreign troops in Iraq.

"Despite the internal and external difficulties that we might face, it remains best for Iraq on principle and practically," he told MPs, according to DW.

The Pentagon had announced that General Soleimani was assassinated on Donald Trump's order.

According to the New York Times, the top Iranian general was killed when an American MQ-9 Reaper drone fired missiles into a convoy that was leaving the airport.

End of U.S. malign presence in West Asia has begun: Zarif

1 → "Targeting cultural sites is a WAR CRIME," Zarif said.

The new threats by Trump came after the United States assassinated Qassemi Soleimani, the commander of the IRGC Quds Force, near Baghdad Airport on Friday morning.

"Having committed grave breaches of int'l law in Friday's cowardly assassinations, @realDonaldTrump threatens to commit again new breaches of JUS COGENS."

Jus cogens refers to certain fundamental, overriding principles of international law.

In another tweet, Zarif added, "Those masquerading as diplomats and those who shamelessly sat to identify Iranian cultural & civilian targets should not even bother to open a law dictionary."

Trump tweeted on Saturday, "...targeted 52 Iranian sites (representing the 52 American hostages taken by Iran many years ago),

some at a very high level & important to Iran & the Iranian culture, and those targets, and Iran itself, WILL BE HIT VERY FAST AND VERY HARD. The USA wants no more threats!"

Trump's threats came after Iranian authorities said they would take a hard revenge for assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani in the U.S. airstrikes in the Iraqi capital Baghdad on Friday morning.

Zarif said by threatening to target Iranian

cultural sites, Zarif is trying to follow ISIS who destroyed cultural heritage sites in Syria.

Zarif also reminded Trump and his lieutenants that during the course of history "barbarians" have ravaged Iranian cities, monuments and libraries but Iran is still "standing tall".

"A reminder to those hallucinating about emulating ISIS war crimes by targeting our cultural heritage: Through MILLENNIA of history, barbarians have come and ravaged

our cities, razed our monuments and burnt our libraries. Where are they now?" Zarif wrote.

He added, "We're still here, & standing tall."

Also writing on his Twitter account on Saturday, the Iranian chief diplomat compared U.S. Secretary of State to "an arrogant clown masquerading as a diplomat".

Immediately after the assassination of General Soleimani, Pompeo wrote a tweet claiming that Iraqis were dancing that Soleimani has been assassinated.

"An arrogant clown—masquerading as a diplomat—claimed people were dancing in the cities of Iraq. Today, hundreds of thousands of our proud Iraqi brothers and sisters offered him their response across their soil."

Zarif posted photos of Iraqis participating massively in the funeral procession of General Soleimani in Baghdad, Najaf and Karbala on his Twitter account as evidence.

"A reminder to those hallucinating about emulating ISIS war crimes by targeting our cultural heritage: Through MILLENNIA of history, barbarians have come and ravaged our cities, razed our monuments and burnt our libraries. Where are they now?"

Targeting civilians and cultural sites is what terrorists do: U.S. senator

POLITICAL TEHRAN — A U.S. Senator, Chris Murphy, has said that targeting civilians and cultural sites is what terrorists do.

His remarks came as U.S. President Donald Trump tweeted on Saturday threatening attack on 52 Iranian sites, including cultural ones.

"Targeting civilians and cultural sites is what terrorists do. It's a war crime," Murphy wrote on Twitter account on Saturday.

"Trump is stumbling into a war of choice. A war entirely of his making. A war that will get thousands of Americans killed. Congress must stop him," he added.

Demonstrators in dozens of cities around the U.S. gathered Saturday to protest the U.S. assassination of Iranian military commander Lieutenant General Soleimani in Baghdad on Friday morning.

According to the Associated Press, more than 70 planned protests were organized by CODEPINK and Act Now to Stop War and End Racism, a U.S.-based anti-war coalition, along with other groups.

From Tampa to Philadelphia and San Francisco to New York, protesters carried signs and chanted anti-war slogans.

Protest organizers said the Trump administration has essentially started a war with Iran by assassinating General

Soleimani.

In Miami, people shouted, "No more drone murders," "We want peace now" and "What do we want? Peace in Iran."

Demonstrators gathered in Times Square on Saturday chanting "No justice, no peace, U.S. out of the Middle East!"

In Minneapolis, protesters gathered near the University of Minnesota holding signs and chanting. Among them was Meredith Aby, a longtime leader of the local Anti-War Committee.

"We need to be pulling out of Iraq, not sending thousands more troops. We need to be trying to cool things down with Iran, not pouring gasoline on a fire," Aby, 47, said.

Leader's advisor: U.S. must leave the region

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Ali Akbar Velayati, a top foreign policy adviser to the Leader, said on Sunday that the United States must leave the region, calling assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani a "foolish act".

"Iran will act in a way that makes the United States regret. The United States must leave the region, otherwise there will be another Vietnam for it," he said during a speech at a ceremony held to commemorate Lieutenant General Soleimani at Shahid Beheshti University. Lieutenant General Soleimani was



assassinated in a U.S. airstrike in Baghdad on Friday morning.

In a visit to Soleimani's family, Velayati said, "The United States will be hit from where it cannot even imagine."

Iran summons Swiss ambassador for third time over Trump's new threats

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Swiss Ambassador to Tehran Markus Leitner, whose country represents the United States' interests in Iran, was summoned to the Foreign Ministry on Sunday.

It was the third time that the Swiss ambassador is being summoned by the Iranian Foreign Ministry over the past few days.

Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said that the ambassador was summoned to receive Iran's protests over U.S. President Donald Trump's tweet on Saturday in which he threatened to target 52 Iranian

sites, including cultural and civilian ones. Araghchi said that based on international law, Trump's remarks are clear example of "war crime".

"Such threat reminds us of Mongols' attacks and criminal and terrorist groups' actions in destroying cultural and historic places. Based on international law, it is a clear example of war crime," he said.

Araghchi also said that Iran has proven it makes any aggressor regretful.

He noted that Iran reserved the right to respond to assassination of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad on Friday.

EU's Borrell invites Zarif to Brussels

By staff and agency
European Union's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has invited Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif to Brussels to discuss the situation in the Middle East, an EU statement said on Sunday.

According to The New York Times, Borrell invited Zarif to Brussels to discuss the situation

in the Middle East and the preservation of a nuclear deal with Tehran.

Borrell tweeted on Saturday, "Spoke w Iranian FM @JZarif about recent developments. Underlined need for de-escalation of tensions, to exercise restraint & avoid further escalation. Also discussed importance of preserving #JCPOA, which remains crucial for

global security. I am committed to role as coordinator."

Regional tension has highly escalated since Friday after assassination of Iranian Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani in an airstrike near Baghdad's international airport.

The White House and the Pentagon claimed responsibility for the assassination of General

Soleimani, saying the attack was carried out at the direction of U.S. President Donald Trump.

General Soleimani was a legendary commander in the fight against terrorism in Iraq and Syria.

Iranian officials, including the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, have vowed that Iran will take revenge on the U.S. terrorist act.

Tehran says responded appropriately to Pompeo's 'undiplomatic' letter

Europe's security is owed to General Soleimani's war on Daesh, Foreign Ministry spokesman says

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said on Sunday that Tehran responded appropriately to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's "undiplomatic" and "offensive" letter.

"The letter, from the U.S. secretary of state, was contrary to diplomatic norms and was offensive," Mousavi said at a press conference in Tehran.

"We mulled the letter and responded in a way that U.S. officials deserve but also at a lower diplomatic level," he said.

The IRGC announced in a statement on Friday morning that Lieutenant General Soleimani and PMU deputy commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis were martyred in an attack carried out by the U.S.

A Swiss diplomat delivered a message from the United States to Iran on Friday over the U.S. killing of Soleimani, the Swiss Foreign Ministry said.

"The chargé d'affaires was informed of Iran's position and in turn delivered the message of the United States," the ministry said in an emailed response to a Reuters query, without elaborating.

Switzerland represents the interests of the United States in Iran, allowing the two countries to maintain a diplomatic channel of communication.

During his press conference, Mousavi said General Soleimani was a hero around the world for his fight against terrorism, violence and extremism.

"The foreign media try to depict him in another way, but this will not work," he added.

General Soleimani was a legendary commander in the fight against terrorism in Iraq and Syria.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei released a message on Friday saying Iran will take a "tough revenge" on the criminals who killed the top Iranian general.

"After years of sincere and courageous jihad against the devils and evil-doers of the world and after years of wishing for martyrdom in the path of God, alas, dear Soleimani attained this lofty station and his pure blood was spilled by the vilest of humans,"



"The elimination of the Daesh terrorist group by Resistance forces with General Soleimani in command has made Europe safe for them."

the Leader's message read.

President Hassan Rouhani said Soleimani's assassination will "double the determination of the great Iranian nation and other independent states to stand against America's excessive demands and to defend the Islamic values."

The Pentagon has said in a statement that President Donald Trump ordered the U.S. military to assassinate Soleimani.

Mousavi also responded to Trump's threatening tweets, saying, "I'm sorry that we live in a world where the U.S. president threatens to attack Iranian cultural targets and his advisors do not prevent such remarks

and let Trump speak words that are in violation of international law."

"We will respond to threats with threats and we advise them to avoid making empty threats," he asserted.

In a series of tweets on Sunday, Trump said, "We have targeted 52 Iranian sites (representing the 52 American hostages taken by Iran many years ago), some at a very high level & important to Iran & the Iranian culture, and those targets, and Iran itself, WILL BE HIT VERY FAST AND VERY HARD. The USA wants no more threats!"

Zarif also responded to Trump's tweets,

"I'm sorry that we live in a world where the U.S. president threatens to attack Iranian cultural targets and his advisors do not prevent such remarks and let Trump speak words that are in violation of international law."

saying, "Targeting cultural sites is a WAR CRIME."

Mousavi urged other countries of the world to stand up to the U.S. bullying, unilateralism and violation of other states' sovereignty.

There is no ambiguity that the countries of the world are facing a regime which breaches international norms, he said.

The spokesman further expressed the hope that someday the world will come to its senses and will begin to condemn the Americans.

It is expected that countries with good record of humanitarian activities take their positions to some extent independently so they can stand up to the U.S. bullying and unilateralism and violation of other states' sovereignty, he added.

Asked about European countries' response to the assassination of General Soleimani, Mousavi criticized their "unconstructive" stance, saying Europeans, for their security today, are indebted to the ceaseless efforts of the late commander.

"The elimination of the Daesh terrorist group by Resistance forces with General Soleimani in command has made Europe safe for them," Mousavi said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Mousavi said Iran will decide on Sunday night about its next step to further roll back its commitments to the 2015 nuclear deal.

U.S. President Donald Trump pulled the United States out of the agreement between Tehran and six major powers in 2018 and imposed harsh sanctions on Iran.

"Tonight, there will be a very important meeting to decide about our next nuclear step and the implementation of the deal," the spokesman said.

"Considering the recent threats, it should be underlined that in politics, all developments and threats are linked to each other," he added.

In reaction to the U.S. policy of "maximum pressure" since Trump pulled out of the nuclear agreement, Iran has gradually reduced its commitments under the deal, under which Tehran undertook to curb its nuclear activity in exchange for a lifting of sanctions.

Iran takes fifth and last step to end commitment to JCPOA

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Late on Sunday, Iran took the fifth and last step to fully end commitment to the 2015 nuclear deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the government announced in a statement.

According to the new step, from now on Iran will no longer commit to any limits on level of uranium enrichment, stockpile of nuclear fuel and also nuclear research and development, the statement said.

Ayatollah Khamenei's advisor says Iran's response will be 'against military sites'

By staff and agency

Hossein Dehghan, an advisor to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said on Sunday that Iran's response to the United States' action in assassinating Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani will certainly be a military response "against military sites".

"The response for sure will be military and against military sites," he told CNN in an exclusive interview.

"Let me tell you one thing: Our leadership has officially announced that we have never been seeking war and we will not be seeking war," Dehghan said.

He said, "It was America that has started the war. Therefore, they should accept appropriate reactions to their actions. The only thing that can end this period of war is for the Americans to receive a blow that is equal to the blow they have inflicted. Afterward they should not seek a new cycle."

Lieutenant General Soleimani was assassinated in a U.S. air strike on Baghdad Airport on Friday morning.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Ali Khamenei released a message on Friday to express his deepest condolences over the martyrdom of General Soleimani, saying Iran will take tough revenge on the criminals who killed the top Iranian general.

Dehghan described Trump's tweets as 'ridiculous and absurd'

Dehghan also described U.S. President Donald Trump's tweets as "ridiculous and absurd".

"[Trump] doesn't know international law. He doesn't recognize UN resolutions either. Basically he is a veritable gangster and a gambler. He is no politician he has no mental stability," Dehghan said.

In a tweet on Saturday, Trump said, "...targeted 52 Iranian sites (representing the 52 American hostages taken by Iran many years ago), some at a very high level & important to Iran & the Iranian culture, and those targets, and Iran itself, WILL BE HIT VERY FAST AND VERY HARD. The USA wants no more threats!"

Making reference to United Nations resolution 2347 which condemns the unlawful destruction of cultural heritage, Dehghan said, "If [Trump] wants to impose rule, logic and rationality over his decision he should accept that he is a war criminal and must be tried in a relevant court."

Asked what would happen if Trump were to carry out his threat to strike any of Iran's cultural sites, Dehghan said, "For sure no American military staff, no American political center, no American military base, no American vessel will be safe. And they are accessible to us."

"[Trump] doesn't know international law. He doesn't recognize UN resolutions either. Basically he is a veritable gangster and a gambler. He is no politician he has no mental stability," General Dehghan says.



Parliament backs 'tough revenge' against the United States

POLITICAL TEHRAN — Iranian lawmakers on Sunday voiced their support for a tough revenge against the United States over the assassination of IRGC Quds Force Commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

"Assassination of Lieutenant General Soleimani was not only a violation of Iraq's sovereignty but also a threat to national security of Iran, West Asia and the whole world," the MPs said in a statement, Mehr reported.

"We require Iraq to take legal actions in this regard and urge the Iranian armed forces and the Supreme National Security Council to take a tough revenge on the terrorist U.S.," they said.

"The U.S. has commenced a dangerous adventure and any compromise will lead to more similar actions. There-

fore, we ask Iran's diplomatic apparatus to use all available capacities to follow up on the United States' terrorist act in international courts and bodies."

The Iranian lawmakers also described the U.S. move as a "true example of terrorism."

General Soleimani, the deputy head of Iraq's Hashd al-Sha'abi, and a number of their entourage were assassinated in an airstrike by American drones near the Baghdad International Airport in the early hours of Friday.

The White House and the Pentagon claimed responsibility for the assassination of General Soleimani, saying the attack was carried out at the direction of Donald Trump.

According to the New York Times, the top Iranian gen-

eral was killed when an American MQ-9 Reaper drone fired missiles into a convoy that was leaving the airport.

The strike was a serious escalation of Trump's growing confrontation with Tehran, which began almost a week ago when U.S. forces conducted drone strikes on locations of the PMU forces in Iraq, killing at least 25 individuals and leaving another 51 injured.

The attacks came in response to alleged attacks targeting American forces.

President Rouhani said on Saturday that the Americans did not realize what a grave mistake they made.

"They will see the consequences of this heinous act not only today, but also in years to come," he added.

Senior IRGC commander: Iran not after waging war, but entitled to take revenge on U.S.

POLITICAL TEHRAN — President of the Supreme National Defense University of Iran has underscored that Tehran is not after waging war, but Tehran will reserve the right to take revenge on the U.S. for assassination of IRGC Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani.

Lieutenant General Soleimani was martyred in a U.S. airstrike at Baghdad's international airport on Friday morning.

"We do not look for a war, but we'll definitely seek to restore (our) rights and take revenge," Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi, once a commander of the IRGC Quds Force, said in an interview with the Tasnim news agency.

"Nobody should doubt that the martyr's approach may abate or subside," underlined Vahidi who was defense minister in the second term of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency.

Vahidi also dismissed the American allegations that General Soleimani had plans to attack the American forces in Iraq, stressing that the U.S. must pay the price for assassinating the popular Iranian commander.

The U.S. airstrike also martyred Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the deputy commander of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (PMU) and some other forces of the PMU.



The Pentagon had announced earlier that General Soleimani was killed on Donald Trump's order.

According to the New York Times, the top Iranian general was killed when an American MQ-9 Reaper drone fired missiles into a convoy that was leaving the airport.

In a decree on Friday, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei, who is also Commander-in-Chief of the Iranian Armed Forces, appointed Brigadier General Esmail Qa'ani as the new commander of the IRGC Quds Force. The appointment came hours after General Soleimani was assassinated.

On Saturday, Tehran University students held rallies in front of the Swiss embassy, which represents U.S. interests in Iran, to condemn the assassination of Soleimani by the U.S. terrorists in Iraq.

U.S. starts troop pullout amid Iran's 'tough revenge' warnings

TEHRAN (FNA) — The United States started retreating troops from the region on Sunday after Iran warned of painstaking retaliation for the assassination of its top general, and despite President Donald Trump's bombastic remarks that it would bomb 52 Iranian sites if Tehran embarks on threats.

Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, Deputy Commander of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), or Hashd al-Shabi, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, and several others were martyred in a targeted assassination raid by U.S. aircraft in Iraq on Friday.

Iranian officials branded Washington assassination operation an "act of international terrorism" and promised retaliation. Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei has stated that the United States must await a tough revenge.

On Sunday informed military sources told Press TV that "the U.S. has been pulling out its troops from the region, despite claims to the contrary".

"The U.S. has withdrawn its combat troops from Kuwait while C-5 and C-17 planes have transferred about 700 guards to the region to reinforce protection of American diplomatic missions," the sources



told the media outlet.

Meantime, another informed source told Arabic language Al-Alam TV network that "the United States has distanced all its military vessels within a radius of 1,000 kilometers from Iran".

Hundreds of Iraqi protesters furious over the Washington's deadly raids against Kataib Hezbollah popular forces had sieged the U.S. embassy compound in Baghdad earlier this week, calling for the expulsion of the U.S. ambassador and American military servicemen from the Arab country.

The U.S. president's new threat to strike 52 important targets in Iran, including the cultural ones, has provoked a strong backlash, with many calling it a "war crime". The American leader has once again threatened to strike Iran "harder than they have ever been hit before" using what he called "by far the BEST in the World" military equipment.

Army chief shrugs off Trump's attack threat

TEHRAN (Tasnim) — Iran's Army Commander Major General Abdollah Mousavi dismissed the threat from U.S. President Donald Trump that Washington would hit 52 Iranian sites if Tehran attacks American assets in retaliation for the assassination of General Qassem Soleimani.

In comments on Sunday, the Iranian Army commander said it is quite unlikely that Americans will dare to engage in a possible confrontation with Iran in future.

Major General Mousavi added that in case of a U.S. military action, the Americans will realize what the digits 5 and 2 would apply to.

The Army commander said Trump has made such a threat to improve his image after the gross and unjustifiable move to assassinate General Soleimani in Iraq.

He also paid tribute to General Soleimani as a popular figure among all regional nations, saying the families of martyrs and fighters in Syria and Iraq, as well as all people opposed to the U.S. and Israel across the world, will follow the late commander's path.

General Soleimani, the deputy head of Iraq's Hashd al-Sha'abi, and a number of their entourage were killed in a strike by American drones near Baghdad International

Airport in the early hours of Friday.

The White House and the Pentagon confirmed the assassination of General Soleimani in Iraq, saying the attack was carried out at the direction of U.S. President Donald Trump.

In a message on Friday morning, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei warned that harsh revenge awaits the criminals behind the martyrdom of General Soleimani.

Ayatollah Khamenei also reminded all friends and enemies of the Iranian general that the resistance path will continue vigorously, stressing that continued battle and ultimate victory will disappoint the murderers and criminals.

STOCK MARKET

TEDPIX	365815.5
IFX	4742.9

Sources: tse.ir, ifb.ir

CURRENCIES

USD	42,000 rials
EUR	46,866 rials
GBP	54,956 rials
AED	11,437 rials

Source: cbi.ir

COMMODITIES

Brent	\$68.60/b
WTI	\$63.05/b
OPEC Basket	\$67.15/b
Gold	\$1,554.00/oz
Silver	\$18.12/oz
Platinum	\$986.40/oz

Sources: oilprice.com, Moneymetals.com

TCCIMA to dispatch trade delegation to Greece in late Feb.

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) plans to send a trade delegation to Greece in late February.

As published on the website of the chamber, the delegates who will stay from February 21 to 27 in the European country are planned to visit Detrop (an international trade fair for food, beverages, machinery and equipment) in Thessaloniki port city. The exhibition will take place in three days from February 22 to 24.

China promises further help for manufacturers hit by U.S. trade war

By Frank Tang

Beijing has promised to extend more relief measures to manufacturers hit by the U.S. trade war as it moves to promote the sector and ensure steady growth this year.

At Friday's State Council meeting, headed by Premier Li Ke-qiang, the manufacturing sector was praised for "fundamentally supporting" economic growth.

"(We) must resort to reforms and market-oriented measures to fully trigger the vigor of market entities," the cabinet said.

Merchandise shipments to the United States dropped 12.5 percent in the first 11 months of last year as tariffs took their toll, while overall exports fell by 0.3 percent over the same period.

Domestically, the lowest growth rate in almost three decades also weighed heavily on manufacturers, with national industrial profits falling by 2.1 percent in the January-November period. Industrial output growth also fell by 0.7 percentage points to 5.6 percent.

The authorities said they would focus on cutting fees levied on the manufacturing sector this year, including measures to reduce telecoms surcharges and cut power costs by allowing business to trade with power generators.

The corporate tax cuts

The move follows last year's corporate tax cuts worth 2 trillion yuan (\$287 billion), including a 460 billion yuan reduction from reforms to value added tax.



Li's cabinet also plans to offer more support for small and private businesses, which employ a majority of the workforce.

"(We) will implement a differentiated credit policy, encouraging medium and long-term lending, equity and bond financing to manufacturing," according to the statement.

The People's Bank of China cut the required reserve ratio on commercial banks by 50 basis points earlier this week, releasing 800 billion yuan of liquidity into the market and further cuts are also expected.

However, Nomura China economist Lu Ting warned in a research note that small enterprises and exporters faced continued difficulties despite recent positive signs such as the phase one trade deal with the U.S. and rising industrial profits.

Lu cited the Caixin manufacturing purchasing managers' index, which eased to 51.5 in December from 51.8 in November, and said: The "employment sub-index edged down to 50.0 in December from 50.1 in November, signaling still-strong headwinds to employment amid weakening domestic demand and still-elevated uncertainty over the U.S.-China trade dispute."

The trade war is believed to have cost millions of manufacturing jobs, and businesses also face a range of other problems, including rising wage and land costs and increased competition from neighboring countries.

Chinese authorities have pledged to remove barriers for private and foreign investors, and encourage industry to move to inland provinces.

The Ministry of Industry and Information Technology has listed advanced manufacturing, electrification projects and new energy vehicles as key areas for 2020, saying last week: "We will focus on stabilizing manufacturing investment and guiding capital into areas where there are multiplier effects."

(Source: scmp.com)

Iran's 8-month iron ore exports up 46% yr/yr

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran exported 10.609 million tons of iron ore during the first eight months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 22, 2019), registering a 46-percent rise year on year, IRNA reported, citing the data from Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

The country exported \$698 million worth of the commodity in the mentioned time span, of which 38.5 percent was accounted for by iron ore concentrate. As reported, the IRICA data indicated

that the increase in the duty imposed on iron ore exports, which is currently at 25 percent, has decreased the monthly exports of the product in the eighth Iranian calendar month of Aban (October 21-November 21, 2019) by 21 percent compared to the same month in the previous year.

In a bid to prevent the exports of unprocessed minerals, creating more value added and meeting the requirements of domestic producers for the raw materials, Iran has levied a 25-percent duty on the exports of raw minerals (especially iron ore) since last September.



The new duty is expected to encourage production of more processed minerals such as pellet and concentrate instead of selling the raw minerals. In the mentioned eight months, the

country exported 3.430 million tons of iron ore concentrate worth \$268 million, registering a 29-percent rise in terms of weight and a 39-percent increase in terms of value.

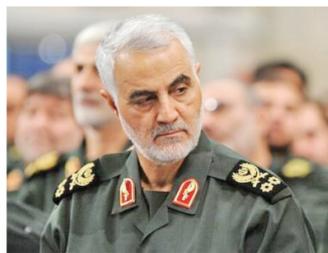
'Thwarting U.S. economic pressure best way to follow martyr Soleimani's path'

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) says neutralizing U.S. plans for economic pressure on the country is the best way to follow the path of Martyr Soleimani, IRIB reported on Saturday.

Abdolnasser Hemmati made the remarks during a visit to a memorial ceremony at the place of Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani's house in Tehran.

"His efforts were mostly focused on standing up against the United States' pressures on the country, and we, as the economic sector of the nation, are obliged to follow his efforts in order to counteract the enemy's economic pressures," Hemmati said.

IRGC Quds Commander Lieutenant



Martyr Qassem Soleimani

General Qassem Soleimani was martyred in a U.S. air raid in Baghdad on Friday.

Soleimani was among the key figures in the fight against terrorism in Syria and Iraq in the past several years.

TEDPIX, IFX drop on Sunday

ECONOMY TEHRAN — TEDPIX, the main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), fell 1,518 to 365,815 on Sunday, IRNA reported.

Some 6.164 billion securities worth 32.998 trillion rials (about \$785.6 million) were reportedly traded at TSE.

As previously announced, TEDPIX rose 49,000 points, or 16.7 percent, to stand at 353,997 points at the end of the past Iranian calendar month of Azar (ends on December 21).

Reportedly, some 82.215 billion securities worth 432.151 trillion rials (about \$10.29 billion) were traded through 10.153 million deals at TSE during the previous month, with growth of 61 percent and 76 percent in the number and value of traded securities, respectively, while 71 percent

rise in the number of deals. Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market known as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), also witnessed drop in its index on Sunday.

IFX, the main index of IFB, fell 54 points to 4,742.

Some 2.842 billion securities worth 17.749 trillion rials (about \$422.5 million) were traded at IFB on Sunday.

IFX rose 15 percent in the past Iranian calendar month of Azar, while experiencing a 102-percent rise since the beginning of current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2019).

The index stood at 4,559 points at the end of the past month.

Value of trades at IFB rose 16 percent in the previous month and 85 percent since the year start.

Housing price up 70% in 9 months on year

ECONOMY TEHRAN — Iran's housing market experienced a 70-percent rise in prices during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-December 21, 2019) compared to the same period of time in the past year, Mehr news agency reported on Sunday.

Real estate deals were reportedly down by half during the nine-month period.

Some 50,247 deals were signed during the first nine months of this year, falling from 100,957 deals in the same time span of the previous year.

As previously reported by ILNA, the number of real estate deals in Tehran City increased 137 percent during the ninth Iranian calendar month of Azar (ended on December 21) from its previous month.

As reported, some 9,664 deals were made in the past month, rising from 4,068 deals in its preceding month.

Housing prices also increased in the capital city during the past month, as the prices jumped 8.8 percent on monthly



basis while 40 percent compared to the same month in the previous year.

Earlier this month, Deputy Transport and Urban Develop-

ment Minister for Housing and Construction Affairs Mahmoud Mahmoudzadeh said that the government is planning on launching a national real estate and housing system, aimed at controlling the country's housing and real estate market by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 19, 2020).

"In order to control and regulate the real estate market, the Ministry of Transport and Urban Development is following four major programs which include taxing vacant houses, completing Mehr housing units, constructing and supplying new housing units through the National Housing Plan and finally setting up a professional real estate and housing system," the official explained.

According to Mahmoudzadeh, one of the main goals of establishing this system is to identify vacant and unused houses in order to receive tax from the owners.

"The system will be able to bring back 2.6 million vacant housing units into the real estate market, and consequently affect the rent prices significantly," he said.

Debt will kill the global economy. But it seems no one cares

By Phillip Inman

The warning signs are clear. Debt is rising on every continent and especially in the business sector, which has spent the past decade ramping up its borrowing to previously unheard-of levels.

Last October, the International Monetary Fund said (IMF) that almost 40% of the corporate debt in eight leading countries — the U.S., China, Japan, Germany, Britain, France, Italy and Spain — would become so expensive during a recession that it would be impossible to service. In other words, tens of thousands of businesses, employing millions of people, would have gambled with high levels of borrowing and lost, making themselves insolvent.

Worse, the IMF said the risks were "elevated" in eight out of 10 countries that boasted systemically important financial sectors, adding that this situation was a repeat of the years running up to the last financial crisis. Last month, the World Bank joined in. It said emerging-market and developing economies (EMDEs) had pushed their borrowing to a record \$55 trillion (£42tn) in 2018.

Unlike the richer nations already mentioned, the 100 EMDEs across Africa,

Asia and South America covered by the report were affected by rising private-sector debt coupled with higher government borrowing. And this extra state borrowing is not only larger, it has also changed in character. First, it has gone from being largely directed to investment spending to, more recently, being used simply to cope with the costs of health, education and welfare. Second, it is being more commonly borrowed from international investors hungry to lend developing countries cash at, relatively speaking, sky-high rates of interest.

There is little evidence that anyone is paying any attention to the dire misgivings expressed by either organization. This year, the U.S. S&P 500 stock market resumed its long-term (100-year) upward trend following a near 200% increase since 2010. Likewise, the German Dax has soared over the past 10 years from 5,500 to over 13,000 while the Paris CAC 40 has almost doubled to 6,000.

Britain's market makes headway Britain's main market in shares has struggled to make any headway over the past three years while Brexit uncertainty dominated. Yet the FTSE 100 shows a gain from less than 4,000 in 2009 to 7,600 today.

Some analysts have argued that the IMF and World Bank are over-cooking their analysis

after missing the last financial crash — seeing danger around every corner. Others dismiss them as archaic remnants of the postwar consensus that fail to understand how the global economy has entered a new phase, one that keeps stock markets humming along and bad recessions at bay.

In the short term at least, the optimists could be right. And that is largely down to the actions of the U.S. Central Bank, which was on course to repeat the mistake of 2005-07, when it matched rising debt levels (especially in sub-prime mortgage loans) with rising interest rates, triggering the kind of financial crash that the IMF and World Bank now fear is around the corner. This time, the Federal Reserve retreated after pushing base rates to almost 2.5% — still well short of the pre-crash normality of 4%-5%, but higher than almost everywhere else. After three rate cuts last year, the U.S. economy starts 2020 with the base rate back in a range between 1.5% and 1.75%.

Without higher interest rates, everyone can keep merrily borrowing. And when, for most businesses, borrowing rates remain below their potential income growth rate — even when that is lackluster — there is not the usual imperative to boost growth through investment

in order to afford higher debt repayments.

But really, this is a back-to-front way of discussing the issue. Most of the problems afflicting the global economy relate to a lack of demand for goods and services, at least on average, compared with the years prior to the 2008 crash. And much of the weak demand relates to our ageing populations, which, in the main, focus more on storing up savings for retirement than on spending.

They are also in the habit of voting for governments that promise to keep taxes low and property prices high, allowing them to accumulate even more wealth. Donald Trump and Boris Johnson fit that bill.

Through their pensions and private investments they treat companies like cash machines, demanding a higher dividend every six months. Much of the borrowing by companies has been to pay these dividends, not to invest.

Baby boomers will pretty much all have retired by the end of this new decade, so most will have stopped investing and just be withdrawing investment funds. And it is this turn of the wheel of fortune that will wreck the global economy — if the accumulation of debt and the climate crisis haven't got there first.

(Source: theguardian.com)

As South African stock investors eye 2020, budget looms large



Early optimism among investors of improved management of the economy under Cyril Ramaphosa, president since February 2018, has been partly replaced by impatience over slow progress in areas ranging from tackling ballooning public sector wages to the sale of new broadband spectrum.

South Africa's economy has contracted in two of the last three quarters, and the International Monetary Fund forecasts sluggish growth in 2020, trailing population growth for the sixth year in a row.

"Investors have become increasingly frustrated with the pace of reforms that were expected under President Ramaphosa," said Michele Santangelo, a money manager at Independent Securities. The "historically weak GDP figures and weak expected growth going forward for at least the next two years have also weighed heavily with economic sentiment and expectations for South Africa-centric businesses."

(Source: moneyweb.co.za)

South Africa's budget, due to be presented next month, is looming as a key first-quarter event for investors seeking insights on the outlook for a stock market that failed to keep pace with emerging-market peers last year.

Johannesburg's benchmark index was held back in 2019 by the dismal performance of the local economy, which is at risk of slipping into recession.

Finance Minister Tito Mboweni's February budget speech will be scrutinized for evidence that South Africa is doing enough to preserve its last remaining investment-grade rating from Moody's Investors Service.

In November, the ratings company changed

its outlook on the nation's assessment to negative and said it wants to see a "credible fiscal strategy to contain the rise in debt" in the budget. Traders will also examine any plans to manage crippling debts at the state-owned power utility, which is struggling to maintain steady electricity supplies, and the loss-making national airline.

The "budget is the next big thing," said Peter Takaandesa, a money manager at Mergence Investment Managers in Cape Town. Sentiment could be boosted by "any credible effort to show that the government is willing to avoid a downgrade and is ready to present a concrete path to reducing government debt with achievable targets," he said.

Construction of S. Azadegan field's CTEP to be completed by 2022

E N E R G Y TEHRAN — The construction of the South Azadegan oil field's Central Treatment Export Plant (CTEP) is going to be completed by the end of the Iranian calendar year of 1400 (March 20, 2022), IRNA reported, quoting an official with Iran's Petroleum Engineering and Development Company (PEDEC).

According to Nasrollah Zareie, the supervisor of the field's development project, with a capacity of 320,000 barrels per day (bpd), South Azadegan CTEP is going to be the country's biggest upstream treatment plant.

The official noted that the project's long lead items (LLI), which were ordered to be built by domestic firms and the PEDEC, are mostly provided and transported to the project site.

"South Azadegan project has always been one of the priorities of the National Iranian Oil Company due to its importance, value and being a shared field,"



Zareie said. The field's output has increased from

40,000 bpd in 2013 to its current output which is 140,000 bpd, the official said.

In February 2016, PEDEC invited qualified companies to take part at pre-qualification stage of an engineering, procurement, construction (EPC) tender for construction of the South Azadegan's Central CTEP.

South Azadegan is one of five major oilfields Iran shares with Iraq at the western part of Iran's southwestern region of Karoun, known as West Karoun fields.

West Karoun holds great importance for the country's oil industry since according to the latest studies, its in-situ deposit is estimated to be 67 billion barrels containing both light and heavy crude oils, and therefore it could have a big impact on Iran's oil output increases in the future.

With the fields fully operational, their output could add 1.2 million bpd to the country's oil production capacity.

Having an estimated 67 billion barrels of in-situ oil, West Karoun fields definitely deserve the spotlight which has been put on them recently.

Saudi Arabia, Kuwait agree to restore shared oil production

Kuwait and Saudi Arabia put to rest a political dispute involving shut-in oil production from shared Neutral Zone fields, ending a 5-year impasse that included thorny sovereignty and border issues.

The agreements reached by the Persian Gulf neighbors set the stage for a resumption of around 500,000 barrels per day (bpd) of crude output.

Riyadh and Kuwait will take a measured approach to restoring output, however, because they are committed to restraining production as part of the collaboration between OPEC and independent producers in support of higher oil prices.

The Kuwaiti and Saudi governments agreed on December 24 to restore shared oil production from the offshore Khafji field and onshore Wafra field in the Neutral Zone, following a production shutdown at Khafji in October 2014 and output halted at Wafra in May 2015.

Negotiations between the two countries over the disputed operations had been on and off since 2015, with expectations raised for a deal to be reached as far back as 2016 and more recently in early 2019.

The Kuwaiti and Saudi governments had been eager to resolve the dispute as part of wider efforts to end energy conflicts among Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) neighbors.

Saudi Oil Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman Al Saud prioritized settling the Neutral Zone conflict in his previous capacity as Minister of State for Energy Affairs with a breakthrough in talks reportedly occurring in July.

Following his appointment as oil minister in September that priority took on greater precedence. Kuwaiti Emir Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah heavily lobbied for a final resolution during the PGCC heads of state meeting in December.

Crude produced from oil fields
The Neutral Zone covers approximately 5,770 sq. km and is subject to treaties dating to the 1920s. The zone was formally partitioned between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in 1970, with the two countries agreeing

to divide the area and incorporate each half into their respective territories while sharing and jointly managing the crude produced from the oil fields. Together, the Wafra and Khafji fields produce around 500,000 bpd.

Citing environmental reasons, Saudi Arabia abruptly shut down the Khafji field in October 2014. The Khafji field is operated by Al-Khafji Joint Operations Company, a joint venture between Saudi state oil firm Saudi Aramco's subsidiary Aramco Gulf Operations Company and Kuwait Gulf Oil Company, a subsidiary of Kuwaiti state oil firm Kuwait Petroleum Corporation.

In retaliation for the Khafji stoppage, the Kuwaitis denied visas for employees of U.S. oil firm Chevron, the company that operates the Wafra field on behalf of Saudi Arabia along with Kuwaiti state oil partners, and refused customs clearance for field equipment.

Those moves resulted in the Wafra field's output being curtailed in May 2015, following Chevron's insistence that it was unable to safely operate the field.

A source of tension
Chevron had been a source of tension between the Persian Gulf neighbors since Saudi Arabia's decision in 2009 to renew the U.S. oil firm's operating concession for Wafra for 30 years. Kuwait was miffed at what it believed was an arbitrary decision by the Saudis, contending it had not been appropriately consulted about the extension.

At a ceremony December 24 in Kuwait, Prince Abdulaziz and Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Nasser Sabah Nasser al-Mohammed al-Sabah signed two agreements on the final demarcation of land and maritime borders in the Neutral Zone, appending previous border agreements.

Kuwaiti Assistant Foreign Minister for Legal Affairs Ghanem al-Ghanem said the appended border pacts are "more accurate and more definitive," outlining a clear-cut officially recognized border between the two countries in accordance with previous agreements.

(Source: thearabweekly.com)

Solar energy prospects getting dimmer

Solar energy installation has lost momentum in the last two years as the appetite for the cleaner electricity fell in the face of fast-expanding electricity connections in off-grid areas by public agencies.

Installation of solar energy system dropped 19 percent year-on-year to 43.25 megawatt last year, according to the Sustainable & Renewable Energy Development Authority (Sreda).

This was the second straight year that the solar energy drive slowed down since the installation by various agencies reached its peak of 57.75 MW in 2017.

It was mainly because of expansion of solar home system in off-grid areas at that time, said Sreda Chairman Md Helal Uddin said. "As the entire Bangladesh is coming under hundred percent electrification, nothing is going to remain off-grid," he added.

The expansion of solar home systems, now standing at around 60 lakh, is hitting the brakes as demand waned for increased electricity connection as the government strives to ensure electricity for all by March 2021.

Electricity connection growing
Now more than 95 percent of the population has access to electricity and electricity connection has grown 39 percent to 3.60 crore since June 2017.

Nearly 60 lakh new consumers received power connection in the last one and a half years, according to the Power Division and the finance ministry.

The adoption of renewable energy has slowed in Bangladesh at a time when many other countries are increasingly turning to solar and wind energy to move to cleaner energy on the back of technological innovations and favorable government policies.

The decade-long trend of strong growth in renewable energy capacity continued in 2018 with global additions of 171 gigawatts (GW), according to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA).

The annual increase of 7.9 percent was bolstered by new additions from solar and wind energy, which accounted for 84 percent of the growth.

Because of the expansion of the electricity grid, solar home system and solar mini-grid

are being closed as people get electricity at lower prices than what they got from mini-grids, Helal said.

"We are now taking various measures to scale up renewable energy generation."

One of the steps is to encourage people to set up solar energy on rooftops of industries and buildings and enable operators of the rooftop solar system to supply excess electricity to national grid at certain tariffs.

Industrial rooftops hold huge potential in Bangladesh and using rooftops of factories 1,000 MW of electricity can easily be generated, said Mahmood Malik, executive director and chief executive of Infrastructure Development Company, earlier in September.

Floating solar power
Other initiatives of the Sreda include establishment of floating solar power plants and solar-based irrigation pumps to increase renewable energy generation.

"As a result, total renewable energy generation is increasing," Helal said. Solar energy is the biggest source of clean energy in Bangladesh with 22,787 MW of power generation capacity. Total installed capacity of solar energy stood at 372 MW last year, Sreda data showed.

The government has set a target to produce 10 percent of electricity from renewable sources by 2020. Including solar, combined installed renewable energy capacity is nearly 3 percent of the total power generation capacity.

A higher number of solar panels were installed in on-grid areas compared to off-grid areas in the last two years, Sreda data showed.

Many people in rural areas are still installing solar home systems to cut electricity bills, said Dipal Barua, president of the Bangladesh Solar and Renewable Energy Association.

"This will increase because of rising electricity tariff."

But given the ongoing international tension and the risk of price spiral of oil, Bangladesh needs to develop a solid base for renewable energy so that it can cut risks of higher power generation cost resulting from the spike in prices of fossil fuels.

(Source: thedailystar.net)

LNG oversupply, lower prices to persist globally in 2020

Global LNG production jumped in 2019, triggering oversupply and low prices that are expected to persist in 2020, says a report by Independent Commodity Intelligence Services (ICIS).

Initial full-year data from LNG Edge shows exports at 355 million tons in 2019, up from 314.9 million tons in 2018. This represents the largest ever increase in production, said Ed Cox, Editor, Global LNG, ICIS.

While East Asian, especially Chinese, demand increased in 2017 and 2018 to absorb additional production, there was little change this year. Instead, supply pushed into Europe reached a record high, having a major impact on regional hub pricing with price correlations growing between Europe and Asia.

In the battle for top exporter, Qatar held onto first place, producing 77.4 million tons, according to the provisional LNG Edge data. This was very close to its nameplate capacity, said the ICIS report.

Australia came in a close second, at 76.1 million tons, a rise of over 8 million tons and should take top spot in 2020, based on the LNG Edge supply forecast.

Of the 40 million ton increase in supply, the majority – 33m tons – came from Australia, Russia and the U.S.



Russian production rates at Yamal and Sakhalin were especially impressive in 2019.

But U.S. LNG took center stage, with 35.6 million tons produced, up by almost 15 million tons year-on-year. The increase will continue next year with the U.S. set to produce almost 57 million ton, according to the LNG Edge supply forecast. Much will depend on the successful ramp-ups of remaining new trains at Freeport and Cameron LNG.

Production from several of the more mature producers was higher too in 2019. Algerian and Egyptian exports both rose by more than 2m tons, with Egypt producing 3.5 million tons as its domestic gas supply continued to improve.

Malaysian production improved
Malaysian production improved substantially from 2018 when feedgas issues reduced operating rates, with a similar story from Papua New Guinea where production recovered after the drop in 2018 caused by a nearby earthquake.

European LNG imports rose close to 76m tons in 2019, by far the highest ever recorded, according to the provisional data.

LNG sellers used the European market to absorb the global oversupply with a rise in spot sales and portfolio sellers bringing more cargoes into their own European terminal positions.

Among the list of records was the 8m tons imported by Europe in December, the highest on record, with the UK importing more than 2m tons.

Europe absorbed over 21% of all LNG produced globally in 2019, up from 13% in 2018 in what was by far the most significant change across all regions. This trend of higher European imports will likely continue in 2020 unless there is a major shift in short-term demand in Asia over the rest of the winter and the following summer.

The volume of LNG coming to Europe pushed down traded hub prices and supported storage injection over the summer, putting the market in good shape as the winter began.

Sharp import increases were recorded across most European countries, with Dutch and Belgian imports both more than doubling.

In volume terms, the most significant increases were in France where imports rose by over 6.5m tons to 16m tons, and the UK which received over 13m tons, up by more than 8m tons from 2018.

Qatar pushed a lot more LNG into European markets, especially the UK, with more from the U.S. and Russia too.

In a major reversal from the preceding two years, total East Asian LNG imports fell in 2019 year-on-year, with weakness from Japan and South Korea.

The combined imports
Combined imports into those two countries, China and Taiwan stood at 196.5m tons, still by far the most significant importing area. But this figure was down by around 1m tons from 2018.

In both 2017 and 2018 the region's imports rose by around 20m tons which helped to absorb a large portion of rising global supply.

Japanese LNG imports fell by 7% in 2019, with South Korea down by 8%. The LNG Edge demand forecast shows a small rise in Japanese LNG demand in Japan in 2020 linked to lower nuclear power generation, but further declines from South Korea.

Most important was the slowdown in the growth of Chinese LNG imports as coal-to-gas switching eased and economic growth struggled.

Chinese LNG imports were up by over 8m tons to 61.9m tons but this was a lesser increase than over the previous three years. Utilization at a number of China's key import terminals was very high, with others still lacking sufficient linkage to the grid to support larger send-out.

How China's new independent gas pipeline and infrastructure operator develops in 2020 will be an important factor in the evolution of LNG imports and the ability that new companies have to take import positions.

East Asia as a whole accounted for 55% of global LNG demand, compared with 62% in 2018.

Beyond East Asia and Europe, south and Southeast Asia are the two key import regions that sellers are focusing on. There is substantial gas demand in the region, at the right price, but progress to open up new markets has been slow in recent years.

Across the existing importers, Pakistan and Bangladesh imported a combined 12m tons in 2019, up from 7.4m tons in 2018.

The growth in Indian imports is restricted by the lack of new available infrastructure, but demand did rise by over 1m tons to 23.8m tons in 2019. The addition of more import capacity in 2020 could boost Indian imports to over 26m tons, according to the LNG Edge demand forecast.

Rising domestic gas production and competing power generation meant that LNG imports into the Middle East and Americas both fell in 2019, despite the oversupply and low spot prices.

Americas' demand accounted for just 4.1% of global supply, down from 4.8% in 2018. While Brazilian LNG imports held up well, demand from both Argentina and Mexico fell.

The Middle East absorbed 1.9% of global supply, down from 2.9% in 2018, largely a result of Egypt stepping away from imports.

But while Kuwait will continue as the most significant importer in the region – especially with the start of Al-Zour terminal due for 2021, Jordanian imports fell by half. This came just as the first Israeli pipe gas from the Leviathan gas field arrived in Jordan at the end of the year, said Cox.

(Source: zawya.com)

What it takes to power the Middle East's renewables revolution

By Dr. Nawal Al Hosany

The Paris climate agreement was a watershed moment for many reasons. It caused a tidal wave of change, sending ripples through governments, policy makers and thought leaders as they have pledged to restrict global warming to below two degrees Celsius after the treaty was adopted in late 2015.

But it is not just words and intentions that have changed. The share of renewable energy in global electricity supply has increased by 27.19 percent from 2015 to 2018 – representing an average annual growth rate of 6.8 percent, according to a 2019 report by the International Renewable Energy Agency, or Irena.

At the end of last year, the world's total renewable energy generation capacity reached 2,351 gigawatts, which represents a little more than a third of total installed electricity capacity, the same report states.

It is clear to see: there is evidence of a seismic renewable energy shift – one that could yet prove to be the inspiration for the revolution we need. And amid the cast of players that are making this renewables revolution a possibility, the UAE has taken a central role.

The UAE's approach to sustainability and renewable energy has been comprehensive; taking into account the shifts needed not just in renewable energy production and consumption but in multi-stakeholder collaborations, public-private partnerships, green economic thinking and green financing options.

Such forward-thinking has propelled the UAE to the front of the renewables drive and is having a profound impact on the region.

The renewables project pipeline

Since 2015, the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council's renewable project pipeline has reached almost 7GW of new power generation capacity by 2018, following record-breaking bids in renewable energy auctions here in the UAE and next door



in Saudi Arabia that has made solar power a cost-competitive solution.

We are aware that everyone needs to be involved in this movement. To continue the momentum in the region and globally, a campaign was launched by the UAE Mission to Irena, a part of the Ministry of Climate Change and Environment. #Act4Impact provides a platform and calls on all renewable energy stakeholders, as well as the general public, to share their success stories of a switch to renewables, and their dreams for a clean energy-fueled future.

It is only by including everyone that we can have the impact needed to affect a lasting change.

When addressing inclusivity in this vital sector, we can look at how the UAE has integrated people, policies and strategies to regulate the energy sector as an example of the holistic thinking that is powering the renewables revolution.

The empowerment of our youth and our women has been vital in promoting the adoption of sustainable practices and clean energy sources. For instance, the Women's Forum for Sustainability, Environment, and Renewable Energy, established by Masdar and the Zayed Sustainability Prize, has enhanced women's contribution to building a sustainable

future and made the sector a more dynamic one.

Furthermore, as well as implementing mega renewable energy projects, including Masdar's Solar Photovoltaic Plant, the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Solar Park and the waste-to-energy plant in Sharjah in partnership with Bee'ah, the UAE's vision for having 50 per cent clean energy in the total energy mix by 2050 revolves around sustainable finance and an economy that works for the future of the planet.

The key pillar

Under the Dubai Clean Energy Strategy, a key pillar was the establishment of a Dh100 billion Dubai Green Fund to facilitate easy, low-interest loans for investors in green economy projects and to actualize the benefits of public-private partnerships.

Meanwhile in Abu Dhabi, Masdar created the region's first green revolving credit facility last October with four banks to provide sustainable financing options for clean technology and sustainable real estate projects.

Because wealth and socio-economic development across the PGCC remain closely tied to the region's substantial oil and gas reserves, the need for an all-round plan to kick-start the renewables push in a sustainable manner is paramount, as rising populations and economic diversification have led to greater energy demand.

Renewables, although a relatively recent entrant in the GCC energy landscape, hold vast potential to cut energy costs in the long run, reduce carbon emissions, conserve scarce water and create jobs.

In 2020, sustainability and renewable energy will form the backbone of the UAE's preparations for the 50 years ahead as technologies, projects and concepts come to fruition across the land. Renewable energy will shape the future of the region and the UAE will drive this change towards a brighter, cleaner future.

(Source: thenational.ae)

Trump's New Year killing of Soleimani finally blows up the fake Russiagate narrative

By Neil Clark

Trump's ordered assassination of General Qasem Soleimani, head of the Revolutionary Guards' elite Quds force, not only means a dangerous escalation of tensions with Iran, but also ends fiction that Russia was controlling him.

Just imagine..... If Iran's President Rouhani had authorized a New Year drone strike on General Mark Milley, the Chairman of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, as he was being driven to the airport in Canada.

Would anyone even be suggesting that the attack was done in 'self-defense'? But that's exactly the line we're being fed now about the killing of Qasem Soleimani.



Demonstrators burn the U.S. and British flags during a protest against the assassination of the Iranian Major-General Qasem Soleimani, in Tehran, Iran, on January 3, 2020. © Reuters / WANA / Nazanin Tabatabaee

The undeniable truth is that for all his posthumous neocon demonization as the most evil man on the planet, the silver-haired Soleimani played a key role in the defeat of the barbaric death-cult ISIS and other al-Qaeda affiliates in the Middle East. He helped mastermind secular, Christian-protecting, Syria's against-the-odds survival in the face of a ferocious onslaught by some of the most powerful countries in the world, who unleashed an alphabet soup of jihadist proxies and death squads to try and achieve a violent 'regime change'. Soleimani's reward for fighting the groups that have targeted western civilians around the globe - including American citizens on 9/11, and British tourists in Tunisia in 2015, was to be blown up right at the start of 2020. Remind me again, who are the terrorists here?

The airwaves are full of talk about the likelihood of a war on Iran, but the fact is that hostilities have already started. Trump provocatively pulled out of the Iranian nuclear deal, boasted that his new sanctions on Iran were 'the highest ever imposed on a country,' and now has ordered the killing of a man regarded by many as the most powerful figure in the country. Soleimani threatened U.S. forces in Iraq we are told, by means of a justification. But what are U.S. forces doing in Iraq in the first place? We're meant to forget that they came there at the head of an illegal invasion force in 2003 which was supposed to be about getting rid of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction which didn't actually exist. What right did the U.S. and its allies have to invade Iraq seventeen years ago? Absolutely none, under international law. But Iraqi WMDs was not the only deception. Far from it.

Condemning Iran for aggression when you just assassinated their guy in Iraq, a county you illegally invaded and continue to occupy militarily, is Big War Nonce Energy.

We've been told (ad nauseum) the past few years that Donald Trump was under the control of Putin. That he was a de facto Russian agent. A marionette of Moscow.

At least now, not even the most credulous inhabitant of planet Earth will believe that one. Iran is a key Middle Eastern ally of Russia, an important strategic partner. By assassinating Soleimani and putting us on a military collision course with Tehran, Trump is not only menacing the Islamic Republic, he is poking the Russian bear in the chest, back and face too. Today's events, for anyone who still had any doubts, shows that the foreign country which has the greatest influence in U.S. politics is not Russia, but Israel (and after Israel, Saudi Arabia).

The killing of Soleimani — and the strong likelihood of Iranian retaliation against U.S. targets, makes no sense from a U.S. viewpoint, but it makes plenty of sense from an Israeli one. The Iranian general has had his card marked for a long time by Tel Aviv. The Jerusalem Postnotes that the Quds supreme "was a key part of Iran's support for Hezbollah during the 2006 war with Israel". He also stressed Iran's continuing support for the Palestinians.

If you were a staunch Zionist there's probably no one in the world you'd want out of the way more than Soleimani. But here's a great truth which is rarely if ever spoken in U.S. public discourse, or indeed in Britain: Israel's priorities (smashing the Iran-Syrian-Hezbollah axis and eliminating leading figures from those countries/movements), actually weakens the broader fight against radical Islamist terror groups. If a 'War on Terror' was really being fought, you wouldn't be droning those who have done the most to defeat ISIS and al-Qaeda, would you? But that's what Donald Trump is doing. All the time liberals were getting into a strop over non-existent 'Russian interference,' Israel and its lobby were pushing for tougher action against Iran, the strongest regional foe of ISIS and al-Qaeda.

In November 2011, Trump went on Twitter to 'predict' that President Obama would start a war with Iran to get re-elected.

But Obama didn't. Not only that, but the Obama administration twice discouraged Israel from going ahead with plans to kill Soleimani when they had the opportunity. Trump is undoubtedly the most pro-Israel President America has ever had. That means the dangers of a major conflagration breaking out in 2020 are greatly increased, for all the pre-election rhetoric about ending Middle Eastern wars.

Neil Clark is a journalist, writer, broadcaster and blogger. His award winning blog can be found at www.neilclark66.blogspot.com. He tweets on politics and world affairs @NeilClark66

(Source: RT)

Conflict with Iran threatens fight against ISIS

The American assassination of a top Iranian commander may make it impossible for American forces to stay in Iraq. That could ease an ISIS comeback.

By David D. Kirkpatrick

For the militants of the Islamic State, the American drone strike that killed the Iranian commander Qasim Soleimani was a two-for-one victory.

First, the killing of General Soleimani removed the leader of one of the Islamic State's most effective opponents, responsible for building up the alliance of Iran-backed militias that did much of the ground fighting to drive the militants out of their strongholds in Syria and Iraq.

The assassination has also redirected the wrath of those militias and their many political allies inside Iraq squarely against the American presence there, raising doubts about the continued viability of the American-led campaign to eradicate what is left of the Islamic State and to prevent its revival in both Iraq and neighboring Syria.

"This is precisely the sort of deus ex machina the organization needed, to give it room to operate and to allow it to break out of its current marginality," said Sam Heller, an analyst at the International Crisis Group who studies the fight against the Islamic State, also known as ISIS.

"Even if the American forces are not withdrawn immediately, it is very difficult for me to imagine that they can meaningfully continue the counter ISIS fight."

Former defense and intelligence officials said that the escalating American confrontation with the Iran-backed Iraqi militias directed by General Soleimani will now mean that the American forces in both Syria and Iraq must worry as much about protecting themselves from attack as they do about fighting the Islamic State, a distraction that could seriously hamper the campaign.

"They are going to be too focused on protecting the mission instead of on fighting ISIS," said Dana Stroul, a former senior Pentagon official and the co-chair of a congressionally sponsored bipartisan Syria Study Group.

But a more sweeping and immediate first test on Sunday, when the Iraqi Parliament was expected to vote on a proposal to expel the American forces from Iraq.

The nearly 5,000 American troops stationed in Iraq provide essential support to the Iraqi forces trying to hunt down the thousands of ISIS insurgents still plotting attacks from hide-outs in remote rural areas, deserts and mountains.

Without American surveillance, intelligence, transportation and air support, analysts say, the Islamic State fighters would detect the sweeps by Iraqi forces in plenty of time to escape and evade — allowing the ISIS fighters impunity to rebuild their organization.

What's more, the intelligence and logistical support provided by the American military is equally necessary to the European and other military partners in the American-led international coalition against ISIS.

Even the smaller contingent of fewer than 1,000 American service members still deployed to fight the Islamic State in Syria would be impossible to sustain without support from the Americans inside Iraq. And some analysts argued that President Trump's drawdown in Syria had already left the American forces there vulnerable to attack while alleviating the pressure against ISIS.

As a result, a parliamentary vote to expel the American forces from Iraq would effectively end the military effort to defeat ISIS and thwart a comeback.

"That is the end of the ISIS mission as we know it," Ms. Stroul, now a scholar at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, wrote in a text message, using initials for the coalition to defeat the Islamic State.

The Iraqi government established after the United States invasion in 2003 has long struggled to balance its dependence on Washington and the West against its close ties to its neighbor Iran. The Iraqi government



An image taken from a video uploaded by the Islamic State showing fighters near Tikrit, Iraq in 2014. Credit...via Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

in Baghdad relied heavily on those Iranian-backed militias in the fight against ISIS.

And many Iraqi politicians have their own close ties to Iran. Among them are many leaders or representatives of those Iran-backed Iraqi Shiite militias who now have now been elected to Parliament.

What's more, American officials have repeatedly reassured nervous Iraqis that the United States forces who returned in 2014 had come only to support the Iraqi fight against ISIS. The American diplomats and military officers have always emphasized that the American forces were present only at the formal invitation of the Iraqi government and only to help increase the capacity of the Iraqi forces to combat ISIS themselves.

But in the last week, the United States forces in Iraq have not only assassinated General Soleimani. The same drone strike killed a senior Iraqi militia leader who was also a top government security official and a former member of parliament. His Iraqi public relations chief was killed, too.

And in the preceding days, the United States had already killed more than 25 Iraqi fighters from a major Iran-backed militia. They were killed in a missile strike carried out in retaliation for a rocket attack that killed an American civilian contractor and wounded several other people at an Iraqi military base.

"Action of this type is an obvious grave breach of those agreed-upon terms" of the American military's return to Iraq, said Mr. Heller of the International Crisis Group. Even if the Parliament does not immediately expel the American forces, he said, "I don't see how, in the wake of these killings, the U.S. presence continues."

American officials have long considered General Soleimani a fearsome enemy. After the United States invasion of Iraq in 2003, he helped form and direct Iran-backed Shiite militias in Iraq blamed for killing hundreds of Americans.

But in the fight against the Islamic State after 2014, the United States had tacitly accepted General Soleimani as an awkward ally. Iran's Shiite Muslim clerical rulers found common cause with Washington against the Sunni militants of ISIS, and the Iranian-backed militias sponsored by General Soleimani did

much of the fighting on the ground while American jets, helicopters and drones provided air power.

The militias also stopped attacking the American forces who returned to Iraq. And those forces settled into positions inside Iraqi military bases, where they depend for their safety and protection on Iraqi security forces — despite their hosts' many ties to Tehran.

Now President Trump has embarked on an escalating confrontation with Iran, seeking to use sweeping economic sanctions to force Tehran to submit to new restrictions on its military activities and nuclear programs.

The Iran-backed Iraqi militias in recent months have once again begun to threaten or attack Americans. And when a mob instigated by one of the militias last week besieged the American Embassy compound in Baghdad's heavily protected Green Zone, the failure of the Iraqi security forces to prevent the attack and the belated response after it started were both stark reminders of their limitations, in part because of their divided allegiance.

If the escalation leads to a larger battle in Iraq between the United States and Iran, the chaos would create the same conditions that have allowed ISIS to thrive in the past, said Ilan Goldenberg, a former Iran team chief in the Pentagon under President Obama and director of the Middle East Security Program at the Center for a New American Security.

"That is a perfect situation for ISIS to regenerate," he said.

Douglas London, a professor at the Center for Security Studies at Georgetown and a recently former C.I.A. official with experience in the region, warned that the backlash against the United States also increased the potential for so-called green-on-blue attacks by members of Iraqi forces against their American guests.

"We have not really had the green-on-blue attacks in Iraq that we have in Afghanistan, but the risk of that would certainly rise," he said.

The leaders of ISIS must now be delighted to see their foes in Iraq attacking each other, argued Barbara Slavina, a scholar of Iran at the Atlantic Council. "It serves us right if ISIS comes crouching back," she added.

(Source: The New York Times)

Opinion: Trump's Pyrrhic victory

Iran has forced America's hand, and potentially pushed its troops out of Iraq. But effects of the U.S. strike on Iran's top military figure may not be what the White House hoped for, says guest contributor Rainer Hermann.

General Qasem Soleimani was the second most powerful man in the Islamic Republic of Iran, right behind Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei.

Though others may have held a higher formal rank, it was his strategic prowess as a commander that allowed him to expand Iran's influence in the region to a degree unimaginable to the leaders of the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Ayatollah Khamenei is undoubtedly the religious and political leader of the republic, but it was Soleimani, his trusted associate, who was its military leader.

Thus, Soleimani's assassination will greatly pain Iran. It will also be a test of Khamenei's credibility, for it was he who boasted that U.S. President Donald Trump could do nothing to harm Iran this past December. Now Khamenei has threatened "hard retaliation," and that it is something that cannot be taken lightly.

Still, much as the elimination of Saddam Hussein soon turned out to be a Pyrrhic victory a decade ago in Iraq, Soleimani's killing may not ultimately



pay out the dividends that Washington expects.

Turning against the U.S.

Iran is currently suffering on two fronts: Domestic protests call into question the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic, and protests in Iraq object to its influence abroad. At home, General Soleimani was a beloved figure because he restored some of the nation's lost luster. His death will give the beleaguered government much-needed support

among the people.

Moreover, those in Iraq who want to be rid of American troops will also see a boost. It will be easy for them to argue that U.S. troops have abused their mandate — to coordinate with Iraqi troops in the fight against "Islamic State" (IS).

Therefore, it would seem that Iran's plan to provoke the U.S. into acting in such a way that the Iraqi people would turn against its troops seems to

have worked. It would also seem that if this is the case, Iran will have won twice: The Iraqi protest movement will have been temporarily quelled, and Iran could once again keep its neighbor on a short leash.

Futile actions lacking real strategy By now, the U.S. must realize that its campaign of "maximum pressure" against Iran has done nothing to protect American interests inside Iraq, but rather, has put them in harm's way. Furthermore, the U.S. has been unable to curb Iran's influence across the Middle East. In fact, quite the opposite has been the case, with Iran acting more aggressively each passing day.

Iranian leadership is most likely weighing its options to determine whether it makes more sense to attack America head-on, or to go after targets held by U.S. allies in the region. Should Iran attack directly it will take up the gauntlet that Trump has thrown at its feet with Soleimani's assassination. But Iran could also use its numerous proxy militias to go after a wide range of U.S. allies in the region.

(Reiner Hermann, political editor for Germany's Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung)

(Source: DW)

Killing of Soleimani unlikely to lead to major escalation

By MICHAEL TKACIK

ASIA TIMES — On Friday morning a US drone strike killed Iranian Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani outside Baghdad International Airport. Almost certainly Iran will respond in a variety of ways designed to damage the US. Its response will range from militia-based attacks to terrorism to cyber to economic attacks, in all probability including multiple options. But barring any outsized response by US President Donald Trump, talk of uncontrolled escalation is probably exaggerated.

As is the pattern with Iranian and other anti-status-quo groups, Soleimani did not see himself bound by the rules of a system he sought to overthrow. He viewed himself as a diplomat, a politician, and a military commander, afforded the best protections of each of those three worlds. Yet at the same time he abused the rules of international politics, ignoring protections for diplomats and civilians. In the end, the US upheld this hypocrisy and Soleimani had none of the protections he had counted on.

Soleimani led the Quds, in effect the Iranian Revolutionary Guards' special forces, but they were more than that. They were a proxy force, an arm of foreign policy, and the source of instability from Lebanon to Syria and by some accounts even into Latin America. They terrorized and killed with abandon. Chalk one up for the good guys. It is satisfying to see justice served.

But satisfying action is not always good policy. Policy seeks to achieve goals with available means. Good policy should have a high likelihood of achieving those goals. Bad policy, on the other hand, would have a lower likelihood of achieving those goals. So the first-order question is, what were America's goals vis-à-vis Iran as a result of this particular attack?

There are at least two possible answers. First, perhaps the US simply saw an opportunity to kill a longtime adversary and leapt at the chance. While the opportunity probably influenced the decision to kill Soleimani, it is unlikely the only or even primary reason. Given his recent proclivity to parade around the frontlines of conflict, it is probable that the US had earlier opportunities to eliminate Soleimani.

Because this attack arose in almost immediate response to Iran-backed forces' brief occupation of the US Embassy grounds in Baghdad, it appears the attack was designed to moderate or deter Iranian behavior. Therefore, in determining whether this was good policy, one must ask whether the killing of Soleimani is likely to moderate Iranian behavior.

There are a couple reasons to think that Iran is unlikely to rein in its aggressive international behavior as a result of the attack. First, domestically, anyone arguing for rapprochement with the US is already weak and was further weakened by this attack. Hardliners will point out that Washington breaches its agreements such as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (the Iran nuclear deal) and "assassinates our officials." There will be few, if any, voices for moderation within Iran.

It is difficult to argue that America's killing of Soleimani is likely to achieve the goal of moderating Iran's international behavior. Rather, just the opposite is likely to occur, with a flurry of violence and other destructive action emanating from Iran.

Second, internationally, Iran's reputation is on the line. If it does not respond forcefully, it will be argued, more attacks will follow. Iran must show not only the US, but also Israel and others, that force will be met with force. In fact, it is likely that those arguing for retaliation will also argue for escalation (a larger use of violence) to demonstrate that any further attacks on Iran are unwise.

It is thus difficult to argue that America's killing of Soleimani is likely to achieve the goal of moderating Iran's international behavior. Rather, just the opposite is likely to occur, with a flurry of violence and other destructive action emanating from Iran.

The next question, then, is how Iran will respond. That response is likely to be escalatory, but it is not clear just how escalatory. The response is also likely to be multifaceted,



possibly including militia violence, terrorism, cyberattacks, other gray-zone actions, and economic attacks, all backed by the Revolutionary Guards. Whatever the specifics, Iran will impose short- and long-term costs through escalatory behavior. Look for destructive economic acts, terrorism especially against Americans, and further destabilization in Iraq.

A more important question is how the US will respond if Iran decides to escalate. This answer will go some way to determining whether an uncontrolled spiral of escalating violence occurs.

It is increasingly difficult to read the foreign-policy tea leaves in a US administration that is unattached to traditional expectations and norms of behavior. Indeed, the Trump administration seems almost to revel in breaching protocol, even where there is good reason for that protocol.

Equally troublesome, there seems to be no set of internal procedures or mechanisms for dealing with foreign-policy issues. Trump likes to shoot from the hip and trusts himself first and his family second. Analysis of past foreign-policy crises tells us that it is valuable to have dissenting voices at the table. But Trump seems threatened by these voices and has thus sought to limit their involvement. Policy is therefore somewhat free-floating and it appears that whoever had the president's ear last and longest decides the policy. In this situation, one wonders how influential Jared Kushner was.

Whatever the case, there will be loud arguments from hawks in the Trump administration to strike back, and probably in an escalatory fashion. While escalating is problematic in its own right because it can lead to a larger conflagration, in this case it is especially troublesome because the initial goal (moderating Iran's behavior) may become lost in the heat of events. Instead of moderating long-term Iranian behavior, the goal becomes to punish Iran until it stops escalating. This is how a state slides into a quagmire of unending tit-for-tat violence.

Alternatively, US escalation could lead to a spiral of uncontrolled violence possibly culminating in interstate war. Here, the danger is not that the escalatory responses have no clear ending but rather that they combust into a larger inferno. Here we have an out-of-control escalatory spiral from which no one has an exit strategy. This is not policy, it is a war. This is two raging fighters hurting each other and a lot of people around them.

The irony of Trump leading the US to war in Iran should not be lost on American voters. Trump, like his predecessor Barack Obama, has sought to reduce the US presence in the Middle East. While such a policy has reputation costs (say, in US relations with the Kurds and other potential allies), it makes a lot of strategic sense for the US to get out of the Middle East. Trump seems genuine in his desire to withdraw US forces, which makes it all the more likely that he did not think through the killing of Soleimani and that his advisers

did not explain the likely response from Iran.

So even barring outright war, any long-term violent engagement with Iran would undercut Trump's goal of withdrawing from the Middle East, and depending on how far it went, could land the US back in a swamp much worse than Iraq.

Fortunately, and perhaps surprisingly to some, Trump seems quite genuine on three points. First, he sees war as counterproductive. Second, he seems fuller of bluster than actual aggression. To demonstrate both points, in the past he has backed off responses that might cause war, such as attacking Iranian installations last June. Third, he is loath to increase US overseas obligations, as extended or direct conflict with Iran would require. So there are significant countervailing tendencies embraced by the president that make escalation less likely than many of his critics claim.

A war with Iran would have notable costs for the US in the Muslim world. There are important distinctions to be made between war with a Shiite state and war with a Sunni state, but ultimately any war in the Muslim world is "bad optics." This is especially bad timing because the US has finally managed to focus the Muslim world on China and its treatment of the Uighurs. Another war would return the focus to the United States.

In summary, conflict between Iran and the United States will increase for the foreseeable future. Iran is unlikely to be cowed by US threats, though the conflict is also unlikely to escalate into full-blown war. The most important question is how the US will respond to Iran's predictable escalation.

There is one final and important issue that seems missing in many analyses: Who will benefit from increased and prolonged conflict between Iran and the US?

First, hardliners in Israel, such as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who have long wanted the US to attack Iran. Israel is no longer willing to attack Iran itself because Iran, under the direction of Soleimani, has placed thousands of rockets in southern Lebanon. These weapons are controlled by Iran-supported Hezbollah. Israel is thus deterred from attacking Iran in all but existential circumstances. In the case of Iran, Israel can achieve its goals only through another party.

The other state that will gain from US-Iranian hostilities is China. President Xi Jinping has made nearly as many missteps as Donald Trump in the last few years. But ineptness in Washington has always pulled Xi's chestnuts out of the fire. In this case, the recent US move to refocus its attention on China, the only true threat to liberalism, is once again undermined.

Even among those who differ on particular policies, the centrality of China is clear. Whether it is a strategic challenger or a responsible stakeholder, it seems clear that only one actor should matter to the US in the 21st century: China. And yet, once again, America is tilting at windmills in the Middle East.

'U.S. assassinates Soleimani to have more room for involvement in region'

By Zahra Mirzafarjournan

TEHRAN (MNA) — Commenting on General Qasem Soleimani's role in challenging the U.S. policy in the Middle East, Mehmet Ogutcu former Turkey's prime minister advisor said that the U.S. wanted to remove him to decrease the Iranian influence and operations and increase U.S. involvement in the region.

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

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

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

To know more insight about the issue, we have reached out to Mehmet Ogutcu, Chairman of the London Energy Club.

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

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

"However, there was also a significant divergence of interests with the U.S. in certain other regions including the Persian Gulf, Israel, and Central Asia, where it turned into a zero-sum game. Iran and Turkey remain the strongholds in the region preventing any

redrawing of geopolitical and energy maps, as declared by the U.S. military establishment," he noted.

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

Iran issue should not be taken simply

GLOBAL TIMES — US President Donald Trump on Sunday warned if "Iran strikes any Americans, or American assets," 52 Iranian sites "will be hit very fast and very hard," and said the US "will be sending some of that brand new beautiful equipment their way."

Earlier, a senior Iranian Revolutionary Guards commander mentioned that 35 US targets had been identified by Iran. Esmail Ghaani, the successor to slain Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani, said that "you will see the bodies of Americans all over the Middle East."

Iran needs to appease its troops and citizens while the US hopes to frighten Iran from hasty revenge. But Washington's logic - ensuring nothing will go wrong by warning Iran to remain calm - is fragile.

Trump expects to win support by killing Soleimani. Similarly, the Iranian government is faced with tremendous pressure to avenge the commander. It is politically dangerous for Iran's administration to not act at all.

Iran may bet that the US cannot afford a war especially

in an election year and take retaliatory measures. Or Tehran may restrain itself while certain pro-Iran forces in the Middle East may retaliate against US targets. Attacks against US targets are also likely to take place worldwide where no responsible party can be found. No matter the situation, an extremely sensitive situation on the verge of an all-out war is possible.

Theoretically, when US-Iran conflicts are at an explosive point, some forces might be attracted and mobilized and lead to further fights between the two countries. If Washington and Tehran are unwilling to head into a large war, they should create fewer chances for those desperate impulses.

If the US and Iran engage in war, it would do more harm than good to China. It is naive to think chaos in the Middle East could distract the US from China.

If there is serious chaos in the Middle East, the US would indeed be more stuck in the region and distracted. But Chinese purchases of oil from the Middle East lead the world by volume, which means China is far more dependent on the

region's oil than the US. China also has large investments in Iran, Iraq and many other Middle Eastern countries already linked to China's economic interests.

No matter how messed up the Middle East is, the US will not alter its strategic vigilance against China. The US may adjust its short-term plans, which is meaningless to China. The US labels China a strategic competitor and it will not change the stance. In the long run, China should not rely on some region's conflicts to relieve pressure. China must develop a long-term capability of withstanding this pressure.

China is a third party in terms of opinion and morality. The US killing of Soleimani violates international law and impairs regional peace. This should be the Chinese public's basic understanding of this matter. China should offer sympathy to Iran as a way of balancing the regional situation. Other countries should provide condolences to Iran instead of provoking it to fulfill its vow of revenge.

The killing has also been controversial in the US. It is hoped that US decision-makers do not go too far on Iran.

China might take Iran's side in a war with U.S.

By Christina Lin

ASIA TIMES — After the US assassination of Iran's General Qasem Soleimani on Friday, Germany's Spiegel Online observed that this is akin to a declaration of war on Iran. Now the US Congress is scrambling for a debate on a formal declaration of war, although it will unlikely block the Trump White House's march toward the battlefield.

Last March, President Donald Trump reviewed the Pentagon's plan to send 120,000 US troops to counter Iran, and the current military buildup of deploying 3,500 more US troops to the region may be part of that plan. Also, in 2017, a think-tank that enjoys close ties with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and the Trump White House, sent a seven-page memo outlining plans for regime change in Iran, and the current scenario seems to be taken out of this playbook.

The next question is, how will regional powers react to



a US-Iran war?

China and Russia already seem to have answered that question via their war games in the Gulf of Oman last week, and the signal to the US is that Iran is not isolated and has powerful allies. Indeed, last year retired US Army Colonel Douglas Macgregor already warned that a war with Iran could draw in China and Russia.

Currently, China's reaction is to urge both Iran and the US to maintain calm and de-escalate tensions, and closely monitor the situation. Beijing does not want war and needs Mideast stability to pursue the Belt and Road Initiative Eurasian integration plan. It has large stakes in Iran's stability: It is the largest buyer of Iranian oil, China is Iran's largest trading partner, and Iran is a key geographic node for the BRI.

Up to now, China has tried to balance its relationship with Saudi Arabia and Iran in the Middle East and set up a firewall between the two, although Iran is more significant in China's strategic calculus given the fact Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf countries are still under the US security umbrella and host US military bases. China is also against further Western-sponsored regime change in the region, and Iran is an important partner in counterbalancing US hegemony and the drive toward a multipolar world.

'It's about China'

Should a US-Iran war break out and the Iranian government is overthrown, it would be devastating for China's regional interests. As Robert Kaplan wrote in a New York Times article titled "This isn't about Iran. It's about China," the current US-Iran standoff is about something much vaster.

Geography matters in geopolitics and the Gulf of Oman separates not only Oman and Iran but also Oman and Pakistan, where China has completed a state-of-the-art port at Gwadar. It is a hinge uniting the Middle East, the South Asian subcontinent and East Asia in China's BRI.

China is also a net importer of oil and obtains half its supply from the Persian Gulf. Yet the US Navy maintains control of the sea lines of communications. As such, China is worried about, first, US restriction of China's oil imports over a clash across the Taiwan Strait or in the South China Sea and, second, events abroad that might lead to price volatility hurting the Chinese economy. Most important, China needs Iran in the "east flank" of the Persian Gulf to prevent a full blockade by the US Navy.

This insurance plan against a remote contingency was spelled out in a 2000 article published by the prestigious Chinese Society for Strategy and Management (CSSM) in its influential Strategy and Management Journal. The article's author Tang Shiping, an associate research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), argued that the US already controls the west bank of the oil-rich Persian Gulf via its pro-American proxies (Saudi Arabia and smaller Gulf states), in effect rendering it an "internal sea" for the US, and challenges to that position are likely to fail.

Yet if China and Russia expand relations with Iran, they could maintain a "minimum balance" to thwart US moves. Since securing oil imports from the Gulf requires both US-controlled west bank and the China-and-Russia-supported Iranian east bank, this axis would prevent the US from implementing oil embargoes against other countries, and Washington would not shut off China's Gulf oil supplies, since China, Russia and Iran control the Gulf's "east bank."

■ A great power conflict?

In the past, China's Mideast posture was a balancing act of engaging Iran while simultaneously not alienating the US. However, what has changed now is the rapid deterioration of Sino-US relations and decoupling over the past year in a new Cold War. With US hostility and "maximum pressure" toward Beijing, Moscow and Tehran (all under US sanctions), Washington is driving all three to coalesce, as evidenced in the recent joint military exercise in the Gulf of Oman and the Indian Ocean.

Thus as Colonel Douglas Macgregor and Dr Lydia Wilson of Oxford University caution, should the US attack Iran in a full-scale war, it could herald the additional entry of two nuclear powers to the theater, and transform the bilateral war into one of great-power conflict.

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Physicists calculate how long it'll take us to explore the galaxy

When you're preparing for any journey it helps to know how long it'll take, and even more so when we're talking about the vast distances of space.

Now a couple of physicists have tried to calculate more precisely how long it would take us to get to other star systems in our galaxy, using existing spacecraft.

They looked specifically at four unmanned space probes already launched by NASA, but these figures also give us an idea of how long it might take humankind to get out beyond the reaches of the Solar System.

And it looks like future space travelers are going to have to settle in for the long haul: it could be tens of thousands of years before one of these probes comes anywhere close to another star system, and several million billion years before there's a direct hit.

"The timescale for the collision of a spacecraft with a star is of order 10²⁰ [one hundred quintillion] years, so the spacecraft have a long future ahead of them," write the researchers in their paper.

To get to their conclusions, Coryn Bailer-Jones from the Max Planck Institute for Astronomy in Germany, and Davide Farnocchia from the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory, studied the latest data from the Gaia space observatory.

Gaia's most up-to-date map has the locations of some 7.2 million stars. They then combined that data with the projected paths of the Pioneer 10, Pioneer 11, Voyager 1 and Voyager 2 space probes, launched between the years 1972 and 1977.

Over the next million years, the results show these four probes will come reasonably close (in cosmic terms) to around 60 stars. They'll get relatively near around 10 stars in that time – but here "relatively near" means within 2 parsecs, which is more than 6 light-years... or more than 60 trillion kilometers, and almost 40 trillion miles.

To put that into perspective, Pluto's orbit only takes it out as far as just over 7 billion kilometers. So our probes will still be tens of thousands of times that distance from alien stars.

Pioneer 10 has the best chance of getting a reasonably close-up look at a star system first: it's expected to pass HIP 117795 in the Cassiopeia constellation in around 90,000 years. Even then it'll be 0.231 parsecs (around 7 trillion kilometers or 4 trillion miles) away.



Of course future space missions don't have to follow the path of these four probes – our closest star system, Alpha Centauri, is a mere 4.37 light-years or 1.34 parsecs away. At its current speed, Voyager 1 could make it there in less than 80,000 years.

These calculations have yet to be peer-reviewed but they give you some idea of the sheer scale of the galaxy, not to mention the entire Universe, and the kind of technology humankind will have to develop to get beyond our Solar System.

We might have to spend several generations in transit in order to reach the nearest stars, at least until scientists figure out how to develop the warp drives that have so far remained the stuff of sci-fi books and movies.

Some experts think it's possible that we could one day travel at close to the speed of light (and get to Alpha Centauri in four years or so), but this is all very much theoretical for the time being. In the meantime, perhaps we'd best just focus on Mars.

(Source: sciencealert.com)

The first glimpses of a pulsar's surface hint at complex magnetism

A pulsar in the Milky Way is ready for its close-up.

Two teams of astronomers independently have gotten the first glimpses of the surface of a pulsar, a rapidly spinning neutron star. Newly created maps of that surface reveal a smattering of bright blemishes in the star's southern hemisphere, hinting at the presence of complex magnetic fields.

These new data, along with precise measurements of the star's mass and size, could help researchers zero in on how matter behaves under extreme pressure.



Neutron stars, the cores of massive stars left behind after a supernova explosion pack roughly the mass of the Sun into an orb not much wider than a major city. Researchers don't really know what happens to matter when it's squeezed that tightly. But "neutron stars themselves can give us hints and contribute to fundamental physics," says Cole Miller, an astrophysicist at the University of Maryland in College Park and author of one of the studies, both of which appear in the Dec. 10 *Astrophysical Journal Letters*.

To search for those hints, the teams sized up a pulsar dubbed PSR J0030+0451 with NICER, an X-ray telescope attached to the International Space Station. They monitored how the pulsar's X-ray brightness fluctuated in sync with its rotation. Then, with the help of supercomputers, the researchers reverse engineered what the star might look like.

Both teams found that the pulsar, located just over 1,000 light-years away from Earth, is about 1.4 times as massive the Sun and nearly 26 kilometers wide. "It sits right in the middle of what we expect," says Anna Watts, an astrophysicist at the University of Amsterdam and an author of the other study.

The surface of the star, however, had a surprise in store. Bright spots on a pulsar mark where atomic particles, guided by magnetic fields, slam into the star. The locations of those spots reveal the architecture of the magnetic field. In textbooks, a pulsar's magnetic field resembles a bar magnet, with clearly defined north and south poles. If that picture is correct, then the researchers would have seen two bright spots, one in each hemisphere. But that's not what either team saw.

This computer simulation shows one possible magnetic field architecture that could create hot spots only in the southern hemisphere of a rapidly spinning neutron star called a pulsar. Hot spots would be about where the blue lines hit the star's surface.

"The classic picture of a pulsar as a beautiful symmetric thing is nonsense," Watts says. The two groups came up with slightly different spot patterns, but the same overarching message: Rather than single bright spots near each of the star's poles, one hemisphere is littered with a few bright smudges while the other appears clean.

"This is exciting, but not a breakthrough yet," says Feryal Özel, an astrophysicist at the University of Arizona in Tucson, who was not involved in either study. While Özel agrees that the data point to magnetic complexity — a complexity she says is hinted at in contemporary computer simulations — she would like to see future maps go a step further. Rather than just placing spots anywhere to best match the X-ray fluctuations, she says, the next round of maps might instead figure out specifically what magnetic architecture would get the job done.

"Definitely more understanding will come out of this," she says. "This is a good place to start."

(Source: ScienceNews.org)

Scientists find evidence a strange group of quantum particles are basically immortal

Nothing lasts forever. Humans, planets, stars, galaxies, maybe even the Universe itself, everything has an expiration date. But things in the quantum realm don't always follow the rules. Scientists have found that quasiparticles in quantum systems could be effectively immortal.

That doesn't mean they don't decay, which is reassuring. But once these quasiparticles have decayed, they are able to reorganize themselves back into existence, possibly ad infinitum.

This seemingly flies right in the face of the second law of thermodynamics, which asserts that entropy in an isolated system can only move in an increasing direction: things can only break down, not build back up again.

Of course, quantum physics can get weird with the rules; but even quantum scientists didn't know quasiparticles were weird in this particular manner.

"Until now, the assumption was that quasiparticles in interacting quantum systems decay after a certain time," said physicist Frank Pollman of the Technical University of Munich back in June 2019.

"We now know that the opposite is the case: strong interactions can even stop decay entirely."

Quasiparticles aren't particles the way we typically think of them, like electrons and quarks. Rather, they're the disturbances or excitations in a solid caused by electrical or magnetic forces that, collectively, behave like particles.

Phonons - the discrete units of vibrational energy that oscillate the atoms in a crystal lattice, for example - are often classified as quasiparticles, as are polarons, electrons trapped in a lattice surrounded by a cloud of polarization.

The researchers involved with this recent study developed numerical methods for calculating the complex interactions of these quasiparticles, and ran simulations on a powerful computer to observe how they decay.

"The result of the elaborate simulation: admittedly, quasiparticles do decay, however new, identical particle entities



emerge from the debris," said physicist Ruben Verresen of the Technical University of Munich and the Max Planck Institute for the Physics of Complex Systems.

"If this decay proceeds very quickly, an inverse reaction will occur after a certain time and the debris will converge again. This process can recur endlessly and a sustained oscillation between decay and rebirth emerges."

And, the physicists pointed out, it doesn't violate the second law of thermodynamics after all. That's because the oscillation is a wave that is transformed into matter, which is covered under the quantum mechanical concept of wave-particle duality.

Their entropy is not decreasing, but remaining constant. That's still pretty weird, but not physics-breaking weird.

In fact, the finding has solved a couple of other head-scratchers. For example, there's a magnetic compound Ba₃CoSb₂O₉ used in experiments that's been previously found to be unexpectedly stable. Now it looks like the key might be the magnetic quasiparticles it contains, called magnons. According to the simulation, they rearrange themselves after decay.

Another potential example is helium: it becomes a resistance-free superfluid at a temperature of absolute zero, and this peculiar property could be explained by the fact this gas is full of quasiparticles called rotons.

At the moment, the work is only in the theoretical realm, but the researchers believe this quasiparticle immortality imbues it with strong potential for long-lasting data storage in quantum computing systems.

(Source: msn)

Study reveals global sustainability efforts play out on local level

According to a new study, global sustainability is a lot like politics -- it's all local.

To slow global warming, curb environmental degradation and prevent the worst consequences of climate change, all while addressing the problems of poverty and inequality, scientists and policy experts with the United Nations suggest world governments must adopt more sustainable land-use and development practices.

At a 2019 United Nations summit in New York, world leaders and policy makers agreed upon 17 Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs.

"The Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all," according to the UN. "They address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice."

To hold the 193 nations that agreed to work toward the 17 SDGs accountable, researchers have begun developing new ways to track progress.

But as a new study demonstrates, measuring sustainability is a hyper-local endeavor. Looking at sustainability efforts across an entire nation can offer mixed signals and disguise serious local problems. "We have learned that sustainability's progress is dynamic and that sometimes gains in one important area can come at costs to another area, tradeoffs that can be difficult to understand but can ultimately hobble progress," Jianguo "Jack" Liu, a professor of sustainability at Michigan State University, said in a news release. "Whether it's protecting precious natural resources, making positive economic change or reducing inequality -- it isn't a static score. We must carefully take a holistic view to be sure progress in one area isn't compromised by setbacks in other areas."

For the new study, published this week in the journal *Nature*, Liu and his colleagues used their systematic and comprehensive assessment methods to measure China's progress toward all 17 SDGs between 2000 and 2015.



Their analysis revealed the ways sustainable development efforts can play out in dramatically different ways in different parts of a large and complex country like China.

Between 2000 and 2015, China grew its aggregated SDG score. But when scientists took a more detailed look at China's progress, they discovered significant disparity between the country's developed and developing regions.

The new research showed developed provinces in China boasted better SDG scores than developing provinces. However, the data showed SDG scores in developing provinces increased at a greater rate.

"China's eastern region began developing during the reform and opening-up policy in the late 70s to spur economic development along the coasts, which was accompanied by better social services," Xu said. "In 1999, China started to address the rural western parts which had lagged in progress. That saw improvements both in infrastructure and ecological conservation, which seems to have boosted their sustainable development. The eastern parts have begun to struggle with the consequences of rapid economic growth -- such as pollution and inequities."

The latest research suggests sustainability scientists must look at how progress plays out and problems develop in different regions and localities. In doing so, scientists and policy makers can identify where and how to better deploy resources like education, healthcare and environmental conservation in order to meet SDGs.

"This study suggests the need to track the spatio-temporal dynamics of progress towards SDGs at the global level and in other nations," researchers wrote.

(Source: UPI)

Computing with molecules: A big step in molecular spintronics

Spintronics or spin electronics in contrast to conventional electronics uses the spin of electrons for sensing, information storage, transport, and processing. Potential advantages are nonvolatility, increased data processing speed, decreased electric power consumption, and higher integration densities compared to conventional semiconductor devices. Molecular spintronics aims for the ultimate step towards miniaturization of spintronics by striving to actively control the spin states of individual molecules. Chemists and physicists at Kiel University joined forces with colleagues from France, and Switzerland to design, deposit and operate single molecular spin switches on surfaces. The newly developed molecules feature stable spin states and do not lose their functionality upon adsorption on surfaces. They present their results in the current issue of the journal *Nature Nanotechnology*.

The spin states of the new compounds are stable for at least several days. "This is achieved by a design trick that resembles the fundamental electronic circuits in computers,



the so-called flip-flops. Bistability or switching between 0 and 1 is realized by looping the output signal back to the input," says experimental physicist Dr. Manuel Gruber from Kiel University. The new molecules have three properties that are coupled with each other in such a feedback loop: their shape (planar or flat), the proximity of two subunits, called coordination (yes or no), and the spin state (high-spin or low-spin). Thus, the molecules are locked either in one or

the other state. Upon sublimation and deposition on a silver surface, the switches self-assemble into highly ordered arrays. Each molecule in such an array can be separately addressed with a scanning tunneling microscope and switched between the states by applying a positive or negative voltage.

"Our new spin switch realizes in just one molecule what takes several components like transistors and resistors in conventional electronics. That's a big step towards further miniaturization," Dr. Manuel Gruber and organic chemist Prof. Dr. Rainer Herges explain. The next step will be to increase the complexity of the compounds to implement more sophisticated operations.

Molecules are the smallest constructions that can be designed and built with atomic precision and predictable properties. Their response to electrical or optical stimuli and their custom-designed chemical and physical functionality make them unique candidates to develop new classes of devices such as controllable surface catalysts or optical devices.

(Source: Science Daily)

SpaceX Starlink launch: How to watch Falcon 9 deliver 60 more satellites to space

We're only a few days into 2020 and SpaceX is already gearing up for its first launch of the year. On Jan. 6, the workhorse Falcon 9 booster will be sending a batch of 60 Starlink satellites into low-earth orbit, part of the company's plans to deliver broadband internet across the globe. If you want to watch the launch and landing live (launches are always thrilling), here's how you can do it.

The launch has been delayed several times, but the Falcon 9 is now scheduled to lift off from Cape Canaveral, Florida, on Monday, at approximately 9:19 p.m. ET (6:19 p.m. PT). Weather conditions at Cape Canaveral are looking good, with a less than 10% chance of cancellation and a 20% chance of delay.

SpaceX carries a livestream on its webcast page for every launch, and this Starlink mission will be no different. We'll post a YouTube link here when it becomes available.

The reusable Falcon 9 booster will be on its fourth flight, having previously flown once in 2018 and twice in 2019. Provided all goes well, around 10 minutes after launch it'll return to Earth and land on the Of Course I Still Love You dronship, stationed in the Atlantic ocean.

SpaceX launched its first batch of 60 Starlink satellites to orbit in 2019, but this is a particularly interesting addition for Starlink as it promises to bring the total number of tiny craft in low-Earth orbit up to a whopping 180 satellites. The size of the constellation has some astronomers concerned because the craft's reflective surfaces interfere with the ability to observe the universe using research-grade telescopes.

Those issues have been raised with SpaceX, and the company plans to include a single satellite with a less-reflective surface in Monday's launch batch, according to Space.com. A special coating on the bottom of Starlink satellites could reduce the glare, but how it will affect the performance is currently unknown.

"We're do [sic] trial and error to figure out the best way to get this done," Gwynne Shotwell, SpaceX COO, told SpaceNews in December.

(Source: msn)

Iraqi nationals top list of foreign tourist arrivals in Kordestan

TOURISM TEHRAN — Iraqi travelers constituted the largest source of foreign arrivals in the western Iranian province of Kordestan during the first three quarters of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2019), compared to the same period last year, provincial tourism chief has said.

“Iraqi tourists ranked first for visiting Kordestan province in the first nine months of the year,” ISNA quoted Esmail Marivani as saying on Saturday.

“Statistics indicate a gradual increase in the number of Iraqi tourists arriving in Kordestan as of Farvardin (the first month of the Iranian year), compared to tourists from other countries, especially from the Europe.”



A scenic hillside village in Kordestan

“17,699 foreign travelers, of whom some 60 percent were Iraqi nationals, visited Kordestan in the nine-month period with an average accommodation of two nights,” the official noted.

He voiced hope that such a growing trend of foreign arrivals will be maintained by better planning and deeper cooperation with the private sector and other relevant bodies.

The number of Iraqi nationals visiting Iran gained momentum in 2019 as the Islamic Republic endeavored to boost its tourism revenues in the face of U.S. sanctions.

“Until May, 2,500 entry visas were issued daily by the Consulate General of Iran in Najaf, which began issuing 5,000 a day in July, Iran’s economic charge d’affaires in Najaf, Aref Abbasi said,” Al Monitor reported in June last year.

Mousa Tabatabai, assistant to Iran’s ambassador to Baghdad, told Al-Monitor, “The number of Iraqis arriving in Iran for religious tourism and treatment is growing bigger on a yearly basis. This is added to those who travel to Iran to see their relatives. The visas are issued depending on the demand.”

“There are 2-3 million Iraqis arriving in Iran every year. Such a figure will more likely increase as the visas have become free of charge between the two countries,” Tabatabai explained.

During Iranian President Hassan Rouhani’s visit to Iraq in March 2019, the neighbors agreed to waive visa fees.

Some two million Iraqi nationals visited Iran during the first seven months of the past Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20), constituting Iran’s largest source of inbound passengers. In return, hundreds of thousands of Iranian pilgrims head for the holy Iraqi cities of Najaf and Karbala each year.

Some 6.7 million foreign nationals visited Iran during the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year, IRNA reported.

“Since the beginning of this year, 6.7 million foreign nationals holding visas have arrived in the country,” Mojtaba Karimi who presides over Foreign Ministry’s visa and passport department said in December 2019.

The country welcomed some 7.8 million foreign nationals last year, achieving 52.5 percent increase year on year. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council, Iraq was the main source of tourism for Iran in 2018, constituting 24% of all inbound visitors. Azerbaijan with (17%), Turkey (8%), Pakistan (4%) and Bahrain (2%) constituted other major sources while the remaining 46% came from the rest of the world.

World reacts to Trump’s threat to raid Iranian culture targets as ‘a war crime’

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, in reaction to the threat said such a move would be filed as a war crime and another breach of international law.

“Having committed grave breaches of int’l law in Friday’s cowardly assassinations, @realDonaldTrump threatens to commit again new breaches of JUS COGENS,” Zarif wrote in a tweet on Sunday.

“Targeting cultural sites is a WAR CRIME; Whether kicking or screaming, end of U.S. malign presence in West Asia has begun,” Zarif added.

Trump’s rhetoric came in response to an Iranian threat to strike 35 U.S. targets in the region in retaliation for the American drone strike that assassinated Major General Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), Press TV reported.

“Let this serve as a WARNING that if Iran strikes any Americans, or American assets, we have.....targeted 52 Iranian sites (representing the 52 American hostages taken by Iran many years ago), some at a very high level & important to Iran & the Iranian culture, and those targets, and Iran itself, WILL BE HIT VERY FAST AND VERY HARD,” Trump said. “The USA wants no more threats!”

This is while the Geneva Convention Protocol 1 bans “any acts of hostility directed against the historic monuments, works of art or places of worship which constitute the cultural or spiritual heritage of peoples.”

Many social media users were quick to say that deliberately attacking cultural sites would be a war crime.

Ryan Goodman, a former special counsel at the U.S. Department of Defense also emphasized that targeting “the clearly-recognized historic monuments, works of art or places of worship” was a war crime.

Colin Kahl, former deputy assistant to President Barack Obama and national security adviser to ex-vice president Joe Biden said that “the Pentagon would not provide Trump targeting options that include Iranian cultural sites.”

John G Hertzler, an actor and an author, reacted by saying that the American people “are not” behind Trump in response to a Twitterer, who said he backed the president.

Eugene Gu, a politically active user on social media, said “the President of the United States should never threaten on Twitter or anywhere else to target another country’s non-military cultural sites.”

Oscar-winning American actor and film narrator Morgan Freeman also lashed out at Trump for threatening to target Iranian cultural sites, stressing that Trump was not his president.

“Targeting cultural sites is a WAR CRIME and makes



U.S. president Donald Trump in an undated photo

you no better than the terror you claim to be fighting,” Freeman wrote in a tweet.

“Donald Trump is a TERRORIST Donald Trump is a CHILD ABUSER Donald Trump is a RACIST Donald Trump is a SCAM ARTIST Donald Trump is a SEXIST Donald Trump is a COWARD Donald Trump is a LIAR Donald Trump is a CROOK Donald Trump is a CRIMINAL Donald Trump is NOT MY PRESIDENT,” Freeman wrote in another tweet, Mehr reported.

“The ‘imminent threat’ was to Trump’s presidency. So he started a war,” the Oscar-winning American actor added.

Meanwhile, clusters of protesters pour out onto the streets in Washington and other U.S. cities on Saturday to condemn the air strike in Iraq ordered by Trump that killed General Soleimani and Trump’s decision to send about 3,000 more troops to the Middle East.

“No justice, no peace. U.S. out of the Middle East,” hundreds of demonstrators chanted outside the White House before marching to the Trump International Hotel

a few blocks away, Reuters reported.

Similar protests were held in New York, Chicago and other cities. Organizers at Code Pink, a women-led anti-war group, said protests were scheduled on Saturday in numerous U.S. cities and towns. Protesters in Washington held signs that read “No war or sanctions on Iran!” and “U.S. troops out of Iraq!”

Public opinion polls show Americans in general have been opposed to U.S. military interventions overseas, Reuters reported. A survey last year by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs found 27% of Americans believe military interventions make the United States safer, and nearly half said they make the country less safe.

Iran embraces hundreds of historical sites such as bazaars, museums, mosques, bridges, bathhouses, madrasas, mausoleums, churches, towers, and mansions, of which 22 being inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list. Under the 2025 Tourism Vision Plan, the country aims to increase the number of tourist arrivals from 4.8 million in 2014 to 20 million in 2025.

The world’s safest airlines for 2020

Airline safety is one of those things you hope you’ll never have to worry about when you travel.

But even the most nervous of fliers should take heart when flying Australia’s flag carrier, Qantas -- as it has just been rated the safest airline in the world for what is effectively the seventh year in a row.

The safety table was created by AirlineRatings.com, an airline safety and product review website, which monitors 405 airlines around the world and produces an annual list of the ones deemed safest.

Qantas held the title of the world’s safest airline from 2014 to 2017. In 2018, AirlineRatings could find no clear “winner” so awarded the accolade jointly to the top 20 airlines, listing them alphabetically.

But this year, Qantas has returned to the top.

The rankings take into account factors including audits from aviation bodies and governments, crash and serious incident records, fleet age, financial position, pilot training and culture.

They did not look at minor incidents, as “all airlines have incidents every day,” says Geoffrey Thomas, editor-in-chief of the Australian-based website.

“It is the way the flight crew handles



incidents that determines a good airline from an unsafe one,” he tells CNN Travel.

“Qantas has been the lead airline in virtually every major operational safety advancement over the past 60 years and has not had a fatality in the pure-jet era.”

The runners up
Air New Zealand comes in second, while Taiwan’s EVA Air is third. Abu Dhabi-based Etihad Airways -- a new entry -- ranks fourth.

The rest of the top 10 is made up of Qatar Airways, Singapore Airlines, Emirates, Alaska Airlines, Cathay Pacific and Virgin Australia.

Ranked 10-20 are Hawaiian Airlines, Virgin Atlantic, TAP Air Portugal, SAS, Royal Jordanian, Swiss, Finnair, Lufthansa, Aer Lingus and KLM.

Notable exceptions from the list are British Airways, ANA, American Airlines and United, all of which made the top 20

last year. Japan Airlines and Delta also failed to make the cut -- both have been on previous lists.

Thomas says British Airways slid down the rankings due to a “combination of fleet age [average 13.8 years] and the number of incidents... which were not life-threatening but there were a lot of them compared to other airlines of similar size.”

Regarding the others, he points to incidents of allegedly intoxicated pilots on United, American, Delta, JAL and ANA. Thomas praises Qantas’s innovations, including the “extraordinary success of its Perth to London Boeing 787 nonstop service” and its recent London-Sydney and New York-Sydney test flights.

The airline has ordered 12 Airbus A350s to operate nonstop between the cities.

He also notes there was “not much between the top 10” airlines, but that “wider gaps appear from 10 to 20.”

Low-cost safety

The website has also produced a list of the world’s safest budget airlines, although these are ranked equally, and so listed alphabetically. They are: Air Arabia, Flybe, Frontier, HK Express, IndiGo, Jetblue, Volaris, Vueling, Westjet and Wizz Air. (Source: CNN)

ROUND THE GLOBE

Durmitor National Park

Durmitor is a stunning limestone massif located in Northern Montenegro and belonging to the Dinaric Alps or Dinarides.

It is also the name of Montenegro’s largest protected area, the Durmitor National Park, which constitutes the heart of a landscape shaped by glaciers, numerous rivers and underground streams of which are embedded in the much larger Tara River Basin Biosphere Reserve.



Some fifty peaks higher than 2,000 meters above sea level rise above plateaus, alpine meadows and forests, including Bobotov Peak (2,525 metros above sea level). Numerous glacial lakes, locally known as “mountain eyes”, cover the landscape. Despite its many attractions, Durmitor is best known for the spectacular canyons of the Draga, Sushica, Komarnica and Tara Rivers, the latter stands out as Europe’s deepest gorge.

Durmitor is a popular tourism destination, known for superb hiking, climbing, mountaineering and canoeing opportunities. The nearby town of Zabljak is Montenegro’s primary ski resort.

(Source: UNESCO)

How to pack your wallet for a trip to Europe

By Taylor Tepper

Having your credit card rejected or running out of cash can ruin a vacation. But with a little advance planning, you can focus on fun, not what’s in your wallet.

The joy in planning a vacation in Europe comes from booking Mediterranean boat trips or researching restaurants in Paris, not the boring details of how you pay for those experiences. But there I was, stuck in a parking lot in Lerici, Italy, because I had forgotten to set up a personal identification number on my credit card (many unmanned kiosks in Europe, like parking ticket machines, require one). That I write about such things for a living only makes the story more embarrassing, so the following checklist has been a crucial part of my European travel prep ever since.

Bring at least two credit cards from different networks

A well-chosen travel credit card should be your main form of payment in Europe. From the London Tube to a neighborhood patisserie, the fraud protection a card offers is unbeatable: You would rather have a thief using your card for their Mitte district shopping spree in Berlin than depleting your actual bank account with your A.T.M. card. Also, the larger spending limit won’t crimp your style if a hotel or a rental-car company places a 200 euros hold on the card.

Pick a credit card that does not charge a foreign transaction fee and you’ll save yourself up to 3 percent of each purchase. And if you have an American Express or Discover card, carry a Visa or Mastercard too, since these cards are more widely accepted abroad.

Before you leave, alert your bank that you’ll be traveling, either with a phone call or through its app. This should let you use your card without incident, although overly cautious financial institutions sometimes mess up and ping you with a fraud alert anyway. While in touch with your bank, see if it allows you to set a P.I.N. on the card (some cards, like the Bank of America Travel Rewards credit card, give you the option). If you don’t have a P.I.N., you should still be able to use your credit card in person, and some unmanned kiosks sometimes allow you to skip this step. Chase, which issues Wirecutter’s favorite travel rewards card, recommends you push the Enter, Continue, or Cancel button when asked for your P.I.N. If these don’t work, you’ll have to pay in cash.

Bring one debit card that you can use at European A.T.M.s

Smaller shops may not accept cards or might “pass on the extra processing fees associated with credit cards to customers,” said Aaron Klein, a Brookings Institution fellow.

So if you want to pay for that pierog in cash, consider opening a checking account that doesn’t nickel-and-dime you abroad. The ideal option doesn’t charge A.T.M. fees, reimburses A.T.M.-operator expenses worldwide, and forgoes foreign transaction fees. Ken Tumin, founder of DepositAccounts.com, recommends the Schwab Bank High Yield Investor Checking Account, which gives you those benefits. (You need a Charles Schwab brokerage account to get that checking account, but neither one requires a minimum balance.)

If you don’t want to set up a bunch of accounts just to avoid fees, check your bank’s international A.T.M.



partners. Bank of America customers can avoid fees in a host of countries by using designated partner machines (Deutsche Bank in Germany, for example). You likely get better exchange rates at an A.T.M. than you do at a currency-exchange window, or from your bank before you depart.

Bring your mobile wallet

Apple Pay and other digital wallets are picking up steam abroad, and these mobile contactless payment systems (where you wave your phone in front of a payment terminal) could save you a lot of hassle — especially if you lack cash or don’t want to fumble with your wallet.

Make sure you’ve loaded your cards with no foreign transaction fees on your phone before you take off. Apple Pay should work even if you’re in airplane mode, so you don’t need a local SIM card to use it. (Source: The New York Times)

WORLD WAR III? Trump was lied to, will this martyrdom lead to a restored Palestine?

By Robert David Steele

Robert David Steele, a former Marine Corps infantry officer and CIA spy as well as an activist for Open Source Everything Engineering (OSEE), contributes regularly to Tehran Times.

President Donald Trump now understands that he was lied to by his Director of the Central Intelligence Agency Gina Haspel (a creature of the Deep State), by his Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (a Christian Zionist), and by his Secretary of Defense Mark Esper (West Point Class of 1986, nakedly amoral and never held accountable for failures). He is furious. This is Zionist "strike three" during his Presidency, the first two being 9/11 (on 16 February 2016 he promised full disclosure if elected), and the Mossad-Epstein pedophilia entrapment network.

The President, who recovers quickly when confronted by traitors and catastrophic events, is known to be considering the firing of all three of the individuals who betrayed him by presenting fabricated signals intelligence from the Zionists alleging that General Qassem Soleimani was planning to start WWII. It appears that the Director of the National Security Agency, which is heavily penetrated by the Zionists, failed to sound the alarm on this fabricated "intelligence," a practice for which the Zionists are famous (they framed Gadhafi with "talking rocks" simulating support to terrorism much as the USA simulated Patton's fictitious 3rd Army in WWII). It appears that no one informed the President that General Soleimani was in Iraq as a guest of Iraqi government to attend a funeral, and no one pointed out that the crowds dispersed as soon as he arrived in Baghdad with orders from the Supreme Leader to ensure there was no semblance of a Tehran-style embassy take-over as occurred under President Jimmy Carter.

The dispersal of the campers may not have been brought to President Trump's attention.

He was set up. Now it appears that the three leaders who set him up are using the New York Times to place the blame for this terrible decision on the President. In an article "As Tensions With Iran Escalated, Trump Opted for Most Extreme Measure" is the sentence "By late Thursday, the president had gone for the extreme option. Top Pentagon officials were stunned." This is clearly an orchestrated endeavor to destroy President Donald Trump.

Now for the good news:
It is clear to me that the President is furious, and that this absolutely despicable assassination of a leader equal to a Secretary of Defense, in a third country, is an opening for completely altering the dialog between our President and the Supreme Leader.

I have, in a direct communication to the President, shared with Lou Dobbs and Tucker Carlson as well as others (and published at my master post on this matter, Robert Steele: WORLD WAR III? UPDATE 5: Esper Turns on President, Blames President in NYT CYA Article) advised the President as follows:
01 Fire (or allow to resign) Esper, Pompeo, and



Haspel, immediately.

02 Talk to Barham Salih and Hassan Rouhani directly to discuss the Zionist provocation, his error, and confirm that the general was in fact, by order of the Supreme Leader, responsible for dispersing the crowds at the US Embassy in Baghdad.

03 Inform both of them that any Iraqi order for the departure of US troops from Iraq will be immediately respected, at the same time that US troops are withdrawn from Syria and Afghanistan.

04 Inquire of Hasan Rouhani formally as to what form of "blood money," to include the sharp reduction of sanctions, might preserve the peace with Iran – as both China and Russia have urged – while our President cleans house at home. He now understands, I believe, that the Zionist parasite must be expunged before re-election – this threat to both Iran and the USA cannot be ignored any longer. I emphasize my view that Zionism is a threat to all of us.

Not discussed, but clear to me, is the inevitability of our President, in his second term, "making the deal" to restore Palestine to the Palestinians. God works in mysterious ways. It may be that the martyrdom of General Qassem Soleimani was the event needed to shock America into breaking with the Zionists and recognizing that peace in the Middle East demands, as the Supreme Leader has stated to clearly, the end of the state of Israel to which I would add: the invented, apartheid, genocidal, Russian criminal state of Israel. As the Supreme Leader has made clear, Jews would continue to live in peace and prosperity within a restored Palestine just as they

live in peace and prosperity within Iran. It is the Zionist state that must be eradicated.

Escalation of this matter serves the Zionists – no one else. Given our President's "capture" and our President's vulnerability to liars – to enemies of America within the White House – to traitors – I humbly and respectfully recommend prudence on the part of Iran, and decisive action on the part of Iraq. Expel all foreigners. Work with Iran and Russia to hunt down and kill any Israeli forces that remain behind particularly in the Kurdish area. Turkey should do the same, as it is known that the Israelis are arming the Kurds against all countries where they are present in large numbers. Put the Israeli heads on stakes in the public square of Baghdad. This assassination may have been carried out by the USA, but only in our capacity as "useful idiots" in service to the Zionists and only because our President was lied to by his senior officers.

Let this be my contribution to peace this day. I will continue to work toward #UNRIG and the creation of an Open Source Agency that provides the truth about everything to the public, while making possible a Trump Studio, a new social ecology that cannot be censored and manipulated by the Zionists, and in passing documenting the need to close all US bases overseas, and invest in Open Source Everything Engineering (OSEE), the only reasonable counterpoint to the Chinese strategy of One Belt One Road.

May God Bless each of us and may God have mercy on the souls of those who do great evil without understanding just how evil they have become.

The long-awaited beginning of the end of America's imperial ambitions

By Philip Giraldi

The United States is now at war with Iran in a conflict that could easily have been avoided and it will not end well. There will be no declaration of war coming from either side, but the assassination of Iranian Quds Force Commander General Qassem Soleimani and the head of Kata'ib Hezbollah Abu Mehdi Muhandis by virtue of a Reaper drone strike in Baghdad will shift the long-simmering conflict between the two nations into high gear. Iran cannot let the killing of a senior military officer go unanswered even though it cannot directly confront the United States militarily. But there will be reprisals and Tehran's suspected use of proxies to stage limited strikes will now be replaced by more damaging actions that can be directly attributed to the Iranian government. As Iran has significant resources locally, one can expect that the entire Persian Gulf region will be destabilized.

And there is also the terrorism card, which will come into play. Iran has an extensive diaspora throughout much of the Middle East and, as it has been threatened by Washington for many years, it has had a long time to prepare for a war to be fought largely in the shadows. No American diplomat, soldier or even tourists in the region should consider him or herself to be safe, quite the contrary. It will be an "open season" on Americans. The U.S. has already ordered a partial evacuation of the Baghdad Embassy and has advised all American citizens to leave the country immediately.

Donald Trump rode to victory in 2016 on a promise to end the useless wars in the Middle East, but he has now demonstrated very clearly that he is a liar. Instead of seeking detente, one of his first actions was to end the JCPOA nuclear agreement and re-



introduce sanctions against Iran. In a sense, Iran has from the beginning been the exception to Trump's no-new-war pledge, a position that might reasonably be directly attributed to his incestuous relationship with the American Jewish community and in particular derived from his pandering to the expressed needs of Israel's belligerent Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Trump bears full responsibility for what comes next. The neoconservatives and Israelis are predictably cheering the result, with Mark Dubowitz of the pro-Israel Foundation for Defense of Democracies enthusing that it is "bigger than bin Laden...a massive blow to the [Iranian] regime." Dubowitz, whose credentials as an "Iran expert" are dubious at best, is at least somewhat right in this case. Qassem Soleimani is, to be sure, charismatic and also very popular in Iran. He is Iran's most powerful military figure in the entire

region, being the principal contact for proxies and allies in Lebanon, Syria and Iraq. But what Dubowitz does not understand is that no one in a military hierarchy is irreplaceable. Soleimani's aides and high officials in the intelligence ministry are certainly more than capable of picking up his mantle and continuing his policies.

In reality, the series of foolish attacks initiated by the United States over the past week will only hasten the departure of much of the U.S. military from the region. The Pentagon and White House have been insisting that Iran was behind an alleged Kata'ib Hezbollah attack on a U.S. installation that then triggered a strike by Washington on claimed militia targets in Syria and also inside Iraq. Even though the U.S. military presence is as a guest of the Iraqi government, Washington went ahead with its attack even after the Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi said "no."

To justify its actions, Mark Esper,

Secretary of Defense, went so far as to insist that "Iran is at war with the whole world," a clear demonstration of just how ignorant the White House team actually is. The U.S. government characteristically has not provided any evidence demonstrating either Iranian or Kata'ib involvement in recent developments, but after the counter-strike killed 26 Iraqi soldiers, the mass demonstrations against the Embassy in Baghdad became inevitable. The demonstrations were also attributed to Iran by Washington even though the people in the street were undoubtedly Iraqis.

Now that the U.S. has also killed Soleimani and Muhandis in a drone strike at Baghdad Airport, clearly accomplished without the approval of the Iraqi government, it is inevitable that the prime minister will ask American forces to leave. That will in turn make the situation for the remaining U.S. troops in neighboring Syria untenable. And it will also force other Arab states in the region to rethink their hosting of U.S. soldiers, sailors, Marines and airmen due to the law of unanticipated consequences as it is now clear that Washington has foolishly begun a war that serves no one's interests.

The blood of the Americans, Iranians and Iraqis who will die in the next few weeks is clearly on Donald Trump's hands as this war was never inevitable and served no U.S. national interest. It will surely turn out to be a debacle, as well as devastating for all parties involved. And it might well, on top of Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Libya, be the long-awaited beginning of the end of America's imperial ambitions. Let us hope so!

Philip Giraldi is a former counter-terrorism specialist and military intelligence officer of the United States Central Intelligence Agency. (Source: American Herald Tribune)

Story of Soleimani's role in resisting U.S. regional designs should come out in future: Turkish politician:

By Payman Yazdani

TEHRAN (MNA) — Commenting on General Qassem Soleimani's role in challenging the U.S. Policy in the Middle East, Dr. Logoglu said, "The story of what specific role he may have played in resisting American designs in the region should come out in the near future."

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

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



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

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

Logoglu said, "The assassination of General Qassem Soleimani has been a fatal mistake on the part of President Trump. It will certainly draw a calculated response from Iran, one that will be specially timed and executed in line with a well-prepared plan. That much is clear. What is not so clear is whether the USA will retaliate in return, an action that will certainly escalate the tension. An all-out war between Iran and the USA is unlikely, yet things can get easily out of control. The assassination will serve to unite the Iranian people and deepen the will to resist American sanctions. Equally importantly, it will exacerbate the tensions already besetting the region and further reduce the chances of reaching solutions to the problems in Iraq, Yemen, Syria, and Libya, including a peace settlement between Israel and Palestine."

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

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

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

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



actors such as Saudi Arabia has been ambiguous, Iran has had a clear interest in eradicating al-Qaeda/Daesh, etc."

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

Last decade was second-hottest in past 100 years, says Met Office

As many as eight high-temperature records were broken in the UK between 2010 and 2019, making the decade the second hottest in the past 100 years.

Four records were set in 2019 alone, including the highest winter and summer temperatures, according to the Met Office, which said the trend was a "consequence of our warming climate".

The hottest day recorded to date in the UK was 25 July last year, when the mercury hit 38.7C at the Cambridge University Botanic Garden.



Scotland and Wales also broke national records for warmest winter, with 18.3C recorded in Aboyne in Aberdeenshire on 21 February and 20.8C recorded in Porthmadog, Gwynedd, five days later.

Dr Mark McCarthy, head of the Met Office's National Climate Information Centre, said: "It is notable how many of these extreme records have been set in the most recent decade and how many more of them are reflecting high rather than low-temperature extremes: a consequence of our warming climate."

"We are expecting the warming trend to continue through the 21st century and we would expect these sorts of records subsequently to be broken in the future."

While still pending verification, a potential new December maximum of 18.7C recorded on 28 December may also have been set in 2019.

Last year was the 11th warmest on record, with a mean average temperature of 9.42C. The top 10 hottest years have all occurred since 2002.

The 2010s were the second warmest and second wettest decade in the past 100 years, behind only the 2000s, the Met Office said.

Last year was also the 11th wettest on record, with some counties such as Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, and parts of South Yorkshire having annual rainfall figures in the top five, meteorologists said. Lincolnshire received 230 per cent of its average June rainfall during the month last year.

Mr McCarthy said: "We have observed a general increase in rainfall in recent decades but that's not evenly distributed so not everyone in the country has experienced this."

"We are expecting to see an increase in winter rainfall so wetter winters and drier summers – but we could still experience some dry winters and wet summers."

A government spokesman said: "Climate change is a national priority and we are determined to address it."

"We were the first major economy to set out a legally binding target to eliminate our contribution to climate change by 2050, and are the fastest in the G20 to decarbonise since 2000."

"Since 1990, we have reduced our emissions by over 40 per cent while growing the economy by over two thirds."

"But we are determined to do more to increase the momentum and drive ambitious action both in the run up and at this year's COP26 talks in Glasgow."

(Source: The Independent)

WORDS IN THE NEWS

Super tanker oil slick

(October 07, 2002)

Oil is leaking from the French super tanker, the Limburg, which was badly damaged by an explosion off the eastern coast of Yemen. The ship's owners say the Limburg has been the target of a terrorist attack, but the Yemeni authorities insist it was an accident. This report from Heba Saleh:

Yemeni experts who flew over the Arabian Sea say that crude oil is spilling out of the **ruptured hull** of the Limburg. They saw several **oil slicks** but could not **evaluate** their size. Thick columns of black smoke are also still rising from the burning tanker, which has drifted out to sea.

French investigators are now expected in Yemen to assist in an **enquiry** into the causes of the **blast**. The Yemeni authorities say there was an accident aboard the tanker, but the ship's owners insist it was a deliberate attack. They say the Limburg was **rammed** by a high speed boat, packed with **explosives**. Only a very strong force, they say, could have **penetrated** the double hull of such a modern tanker.

A French diplomat in Yemen initially **endorsed** this explanation. He said it was in the style of the Al-Qaeda attack on the American warship, the USS Cole, two years ago in the Yemeni port of Aden. The French government, however, has adopted a more cautious line. Paris said a judgement could only be made after an investigation.

Al-Qaeda members are known to have **sought sanctuary** in Yemen's tribal heartlands, but after September the 11th the government decided it could no longer afford to tolerate their presence. It launched a **crackdown** which has **netted** some one hundred suspects. Its efforts have earned it praise from the United States, which has provided military advisors.

Words

ruptured: burst open, broken

hull: the main body of a ship or other vessel

oil slicks: layers of oil floating on water

evaluate: form an idea of the amount, number, or value of; calculate

enquiry: an official investigation

blast: a destructive wave of highly compressed air spreading outwards from an explosion

explosives: a substance which can be made to explode, especially any of those used in bombs or shells

rammed: hit very hard

penetrated: broken through

endorsed: to make a public statement of your approval or support for something or someone

sought sanctuary: looked for a safe place to stay

crackdown: strong, official action to stop unlawful activity

netted: resulted in the capture of

(Source: BBC)

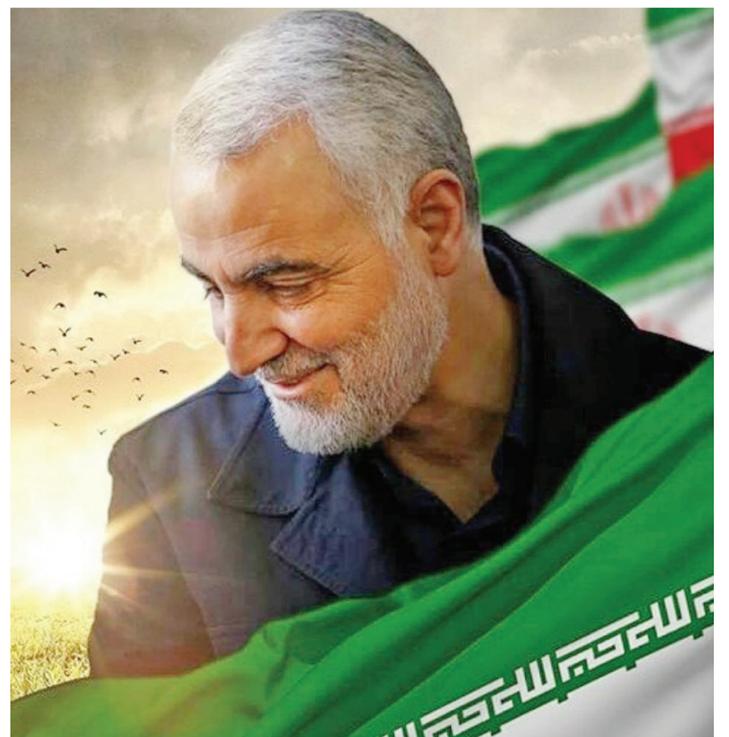
Iran's Assyrian community condoles over Gen. Soleimani's martyrdom

SOCIETY TEHRAN — The Assyrian community in Iran released a message on Saturday to express condolences over the martyrdom of the commander of the IRGC Quds Force Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, ISNA reported.

"The martyrdom of the honored commander Qassem Soleimani was world-shaking. Iran mourns and vows revenge. Iran promises to avenge. The shooting of the most prominent military commander of Iran will undoubtedly have fundamental repercussions in the region. The martyrdom of the architect of power has united Iran, as world must believe. Iran is on the move. A

wave of revenge is coming. This is how the world thinks," part of the message issued by the board of directors of the Assyrian community reads.

"The Assyrian community, along with all our compatriots, is mourning the loss of one of the most powerful commanders of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps. Together with all freedom-seekers and concerned nations, we condemn this painful assassination as today's civilized world does not deserve it. So, we express the sincerest condolences to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, officials and the Iranian vigilant nation."



Three Asiatic cheetah cubs spotted in northeastern Iran



ENVIRONMENT TEHRAN — Three Asiatic cheetah cubs have been spotted in Bardaskan county, northeastern Khorasan Razavi province, for the second time since the beginning of this year (March 21, 2019), head of the provincial department of environment (DOE) has said.

Four locals have reported sighting of three Asiatic cheetah cubs in Bardaskan's wildlife refuge, IRIB quoted Touraj Hemmati as saying on Tuesday.

So, DOE forces have been dispatched to the area for further investigations, after two days of monitoring and field surveys in a region between Daruneh Protected Area and Dasht-e Laghari Wildlife Refuge. The team was able to capture the cheetahs' footprints at several points, he explained.

It was the second cheetah sighting recorded in the area since the beginning of this year.

Noting that there have been many reports of cheetahs being seen in the city by locals, he said that earlier in July this year, a cheetah has been observed by the locals.

He went on to highlight that vegetation cover and favorable food and water resources in the area are the reasons behind the

species presence in the area.

"The first Asian cheetah was observed and photographed in the province by the environmentalists in July 2012, and we have not yet received any evidence to prove the cheetah presence in the area, and this event was a good news for nature lovers," he concluded.

The world's fastest mammal, capable of reaching speeds of 120 kilometers per hour, once stalked habitats from the eastern reaches of India to the Atlantic coast of Senegal, once their numbers have stabilized in parts of southern Africa, but they have practically disappeared from northern Africa and Asia.

The subspecies "Acinonyx jubatus venaticus", commonly known as the Asiatic cheetah, is critically endangered, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, with fewer than 50 believed to remain in Iran.

Roads fragmenting cheetahs' habitats are the main threats for the species, while guard dogs and stray dogs, drought spells, decreasing population of the prey species to support the cheetahs, and habitat loss are also other factors endangering the sparse population of the cheetahs in the country.

England's first wild beaver colony in centuries is 'helping communities and climate'



England's first beavers to live in the wild in 400 years are positively affecting the community and the environment, experts have said.

The animals, who unexpectedly appeared along the River Otter in Devon more than a decade ago, are being monitored to determine whether they benefit the local area and should continue living there.

The beavers have significantly reduced water flow, a researcher has said, which means their dams can potentially reduce the risk of flooding.

Professor Richard Brazier from the University of Exeter said research shows plant and animal life is also flourishing in their ponds, which catch sediment and inorganic fertilisers washed from farmland.

The beavers have also drawn tourists to the area, helping local commerce. Wild beavers became extinct from hunting in Britain about four centuries ago, until a colony – believed to have escaped from captivity in about 2005 – was spotted along the Devon river.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) was initially concerned as it had not sanctioned the release of beavers into the wild and was worried about disease.

After the animals were tested as healthy, Natural England allowed the

beavers to live freely along the river as part of a five-year trial to assess whether they positively affect the environment.

A Defra spokesperson said: "We are committed to reintroducing formerly native species, including beavers, where there are clear environmental and socio-economic benefits. A decision on any future work following the River Otter project will be taken after its conclusion."

Devon Wildlife Trust's Mark Elliott said the mammals have created "beautiful areas of new habitat", benefiting water voles, otters and wading birds such as snipe and woodcock.

"It's been really beneficial from a conservation point of view," he said.

However, Prof Brazier said there are some downsides, such as beavers targeting orchard trees and causing localised flooding for landowners. Claire Robinson from the National Farmers' Union said there are concerns about the "potential damage to farmland and the landscape caused by [beavers'] physical activities".

She said: "It is crucial that farmers have the tools to manage any impacts a beaver reintroduction could have."

The trial for the Devon beavers will come to an end this year.

(Source: The Independent)

ENGLISH IN USE

LEARN NEWS TRANSLATION

A ← → E

SDSs mitigation plan to take effect next year

Sand and dust storm (SDS) mitigation plan will be implemented in the southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan as of the next Iranian calendar year (beginning March 21), Department of Environment (DOE) chief has announced.

A total fund of \$150 million from the National Development Fund has been proposed to counter dust storms in Sistan-Baluchestan province, IRNA quoted Issa Kalantari as saying on Tuesday.

Referring to the SDSs hitting southeastern part of the country causing the residents severe health problems, he noted that the president is pursuing the issue and as long as the fund is provided the plan will go into effect.

طرح مهار گرد و غبارهای سیستان از اول سال آینده اجرایی می شود

رئیس سازمان حفاظت محیط زیست گفت: طرح مهار گرد و غبارهای

منطقه سیستان و بلوچستان از ابتدای سال آینده اجرایی می شود.

عیسی کلانتری روز سه شنبه در گفت و گو با خبرنگار ایرنا اظهار

داشت: برای مبارزه با گرد و غبار این منطقه رئیس جمهوری

تقاضای ۱۵۰ میلیون دلار اعتبار از صندوق توسعه ملی کرده است.

وی بیان کرد: توفان ها و گرد و غبار مساله جدی در منطقه

سیستان است و مردم سالها با این مشکل مواجه و از آن رنج می

برند و رئیس جمهوری به شدت پیگیر حل این مساله هستند.

طرح مهار گرد و غبارهای منطقه سیستان به محض تایید منابع

مورد نیاز اجرایی می شود.

PREFIX/SUFFIX

"-bound"

■ **Meaning:** a word ending shows that something is restricted by or confined to

■ **For example:** **Deskbound** executives can't grasp production problems.

PHRASAL VERB

Hammer away

■ **Meaning:** to keep saying something because you want people to understand or accept it

■ **For example:** I keep hammering away at this point because it's important.

IDIOM

Bring someone to heel

■ **Explanation:** if you force someone to behave in a disciplined manner, you bring them to heel

■ **For example:** The boy had always behaved badly, but the new headmaster managed to bring him to heel.

Iraqi parliament passes resolution on U.S. troop withdrawal

Moqtada Al-Sadr calls for the closure of the American embassy in Baghdad

➔ Speaking at an emergency parliament session on Sunday, Adil Abdul-Mahdi said the American side notified the Iraqi military about the planned airstrike minutes before it was carried out. He stressed that his government denied Washington permission to continue with the operation.

Abdul-Mahdi has requested that parliament order the withdrawal of U.S. troops from the country, Al Arabiya reported, as Iraq's parliament began its extraordinary session.

During the session convened amid growing tensions in the region in the aftermath of Iran's top general Soleimani's killing, the Prime Minister said that both Iraq and the U.S. are interested in terminating the American troop presence in the country.

The head of the Iraqi government believes that the U.S. troop pullout would be beneficial to the country regardless of any internal or external difficulties it could bring. He also recalled that U.S.-Iraqi relations did not suffer despite the absence of foreign troops in the country in the period 2011-2014.

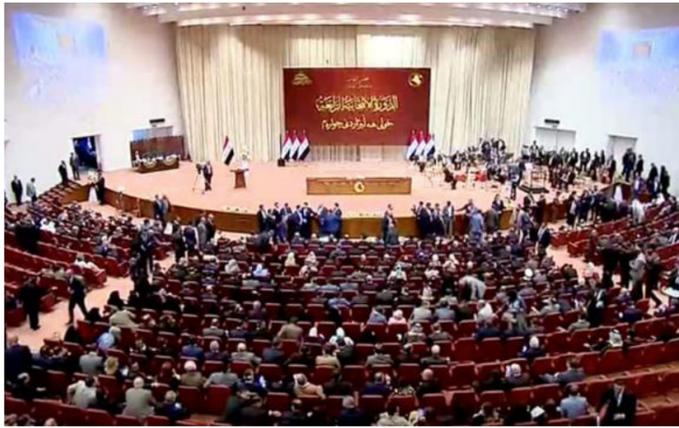
The Prime Minister revealed that he was scheduled to meet with Soleimani the same morning the general was killed in an airstrike in Baghdad. According to Abdul-Mahdi, the Iranian general was expected to deliver a response from Iran to "a Saudi message".

Also a message from Moqtada Al-Sadr to the Iraqi parliament calling for the closure of the American embassy in Baghdad.

Sadr also calling for the agreement with the United States to be canceled.

➔ **Lawmakers sign draft bill to expel U.S. military forces**

Meanwhile, a total of 170 Iraqi lawmakers have signed a draft bill, demanding the withdrawal of U.S. military forces from the country in the wake of the assassination of Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani,



ni, the commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), and the second-in-command of the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

On Sunday, the legislators used a special parliamentary session to push for a vote on a resolution requiring the government to press Washington to withdraw U.S. troops from Iraq.

The lawmakers, citing Articles 59 and 109 of the Constitution and in line with their national and regulatory responsibilities as representatives to safeguard the security and sovereignty of Iraq, signed a four-point draft bill as follows:

Firstly, the central government in Baghdad is obliged to cancel its request to the U.S.-led military coalition, which was purportedly fighting the Daesh Takfiri terrorist on the grounds, now that military operations have ended in the country, and victory over Daesh has been achieved. The Iraqi government should therefore put an end to the presence of any foreign troops and prevent the use

of the Iraqi airspace.

Secondly, the government and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces must announce the number of foreign trainers they need, along with their locations, responsibilities, and duration of their contracts.

Thirdly, the Iraqi foreign minister, on behalf of the government, must turn to the United Nations and the Security Council to file a complaint against the United States for violations of the Iraqi sovereignty and security.

Finally, the plan comes into force once it obtains the parliamentary approval.

On Saturday, the leader of a powerful political coalition in Iraq's parliament said U.S. forces will be driven out of the Iraqi territory following the vicious, cowardly U.S. operation.

Back on August 27 last year, the Fatah Alliance called for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, following a series of airstrikes targeting Hashd al-Sha'abi forces in the country that have been blamed on Israel.

The parliamentary bloc said it held the United States fully responsible for the Israeli act of aggression, "which we consider to be a declaration of war on Iraq and its people."

➔ **Iraqis will drive out U.S. troops: Senior Iraqi MP**

The leader of a powerful political coalition in Iraq's parliament says U.S. forces will be driven out from the Iraqi territory, in the wake of the assassination of Hashd al-Sha'abi second-in-command, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, and Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC).

"We offer our condolences to the adherents of Hashd al-Sha'abi and all Iraqis over the martyrdom of Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, General Soleimani and a number of young valiant men. This is the path of martyrdom, and we hereby declare that we will continue to tread it. We have no reservations whatsoever in this regard," Hadi al-Ameri, who is the head of the Fatah (Conquest) Alliance, told reporters as he participated in the funeral ceremony for the fallen victims in the Iraqi capital Baghdad on Saturday.

He added, "We will defeat Americans and drive them out, as we did earlier in the face of Daesh. We will expel Americans right before Iraqis' eyes as they will be frustrated and humiliated."

"We will press ahead with this struggle. We don't have any option but to fully restore Iraq's sovereignty," Ameri, who is also the secretary general of the Badr Organization, pointed out.

On late Saturday, Al Mayadeen reported that the two major factions of the Iraqi Parliament - Fatah Alliance led by Hadi al-Ameri and Sairoon led by Muqtada al-Sadr - have reached consensus on passing legislation that ends the U.S. military presence in the Arab country.

(Source: agencies)

U.S. withdrawing forces from region despite contrary claims: Military sources

Informed military sources tell Press TV that the United States has started pulling its troops out of the region since Saturday, despite claims to the contrary.

The sources said Sunday the U.S. has withdrawn its combat troops from Kuwait while C-5 and C-17 military transport aircraft have flown about 700 guards into the region to reinforce protection of American diplomatic missions.

The new revelation came despite prior announcements by American authorities that the U.S. President Donald Trump's administration has decided to shore up the country's military presence in the Middle East.

It also followed recent assassination of Iran's Quds Force commander Lieutenant Qasem Soleimani and his companions, including deputy commander of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in Baghdad.

In all, 10 people -- five Iraqis and five Iranians -- were assassinated in the U.S. strike on their motorcade just outside Baghdad airport as Gen. Soleimani's flight arrived from Syria, leading to speculations that the Israeli intelligence might have played a role.

The assassination prompted calls for revenge from various resistance groups across the region with Iranian officials also vowing crushing response to the U.S. act of terrorism.

The assassination also triggered a wave of outrage among Iraqis and Iraqis, and further aligned the two neighbors with vociferous calls for revenge for what they view as "state terrorism."

Hundreds of thousands of people, chanting "Death to America and "Death to Israel," held funeral processions for the two commanders and their companions in Baghdad and the holy cities of Karbala and Najaf on Saturday.

Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi and Iraqi commander Hadi al-Amiri, the top candidate to succeed Muhandis, senior cleric Ammar al-Hakim and other important figures accompanied the large crowd of mourners.

Ameri and many other Iraqi leaders have called on all factions in Iraq to unite and expel foreign troops.

Many Iraqis condemned the U.S. assassination, praising



General Soleimani for his role in defeating Daesh terrorists who seized large swathes of north and central Iraq in 2014. "It is necessary to take revenge on the murderers. The martyrs got the prize they wanted - the prize of martyrdom," said one of the Iraqi marchers, Ali al-Khatib.

(Source: Press TV)

Al-Shabab attacks military base used by U.S. forces

Al-Shabab fighters have attacked a military base in Kenya's Lamu County used by U.S. and Kenyan military personnel, the East African country's army and the armed group said.

Kenyan Defense Forces (KDF) said in a statement on Sunday that "at around 5:30am an attempt was made to breach security at Manda Air Strip.

"The attempted breach was successfully

repulsed. Four terrorists' bodies have so far been found. The airstrip is safe," the statement added.

The U.S. military command for Africa, AFRICOM, confirmed there had been an attack in a brief statement.

"U.S. Africa Command acknowledges there was an attack at Manda Bay Airfield, Kenya and is monitoring the situation. Al-Shabaab has claimed

responsibility for the incident. As facts and details emerge, we will provide an update."

Earlier, al-Shabab said in a statement the raid resulted in "severe casualties on both American and Kenyan troops stationed there."

"The fighters covertly entered enemy lines, successfully stormed the heavily fortified military base and have now taken

effective control of a part of the base," the armed group said.

The attack sent a dark plume of smoke into the air, Abdallah Barghash, a witness, told Reuters news agency. Barghash was among the crowds watching the drama unfold on Manda Island from neighbouring Lamu Island, a top tourist destination.

(Source: al Jazeera)

Hegemons' media warfare to complete the Soleimani assassination project

➔ In the meanwhile, the deafening silence of international organizations, including the UN, in the face of U.S. state terrorism is completely unacceptable.

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

The main goal behind this terrible crime is to undermine the resistance movement not only in Iraq and Iran, but throughout the region. However, the path of the martyred general and other martyrs of the resistance movement including the PMU will continue. This is what the Lead-

er of the Islamic Revolution insisted in his condolence message on Soleimani's martyrdom.

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

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

History has shown that the assassination of great figures by state terrorism of the U.S. and Zionist regime will not disrupt Iran's advance in various fields. For example, it can be obviously seen that with the martyrdom of Major General Hassan Tehrani Moghaddam, the country's

missile industry progressed and with the martyrdom of nuclear scientists like Majid Shahriari and Mostafa Ahmadi Roshan, the Iranian nuclear technology continued to develop. On this basis, the process of combating terrorism by the Islamic Republic will be strengthened following Soleimani's martyrdom.

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

(Source: Daily Star)

Netanyahu calls Israel 'nuclear power'

In an apparent slip of the tongue Sunday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described Israel as a nuclear power before correcting himself with a bashful nod and an embarrassed smile.

Israel is widely believed to have an atomic arsenal but has never confirmed or denied that it has nuclear weapons, maintaining a

so-called policy of ambiguity on the issue for decades.

Netanyahu stumbled at the weekly cabinet meeting while reading in Hebrew prepared remarks on a deal with Greece and Cyprus on a subsea gas pipeline.

"The significance of this project is that

we are turning Israel into a nuclear power," he said, before quickly correcting himself to say "energy power."

He then paused for a beat, acknowledging his mistake with a smile, and then ploughed on with his comments.

The rare blooper from one of Israel's most polished politicians swiftly proliferated

on social media.

Netanyahu is fighting for his political survival in a March 2 vote after two inconclusive elections in April and September. In November, he was indicted on corruption charges, which he denies.

(Source: Daily Star)

Soleimani's assassination marks beginning of new era in Middle East: Nasrallah

'Trump has started a new type of war in the region'

Hezbollah secretary-general Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah warned Sunday that the assassination of IRGC-Quds Force Commander Qasem Soleimani marked a turning point in the history of the Middle East, and the responsibility of his death lies with US President Donald Trump.

"The assassination of Soleimani marked the beginning of a new phase in the entire region," Nasrallah said during a Beirut memorial for Soleimani and the others who were killed in a U.S. drone strike in Iraq on Friday. He added that the assassination of the head of Iran's elite Quds force by U.S. forces had started a "new war of a new type."

At intervals, the thousands of Hezbollah supporters who had headed to Beirut's southern suburbs for the memorial service chanted "death to America" in unison.

The Hezbollah leader said that Soleimani, who visited Nasrallah in Beirut on Jan. 1, had achieved his goal by "dying as a martyr."

U.S. President Donald Trump said in a speech Friday evening that he had ordered Soleimani's killing to "stop a war," claiming that the head of Iran's elite Quds Force was "plotting imminent and sinister attacks" against U.S. citizens.

Nasrallah described the attack as an "open and brazen crime," the responsibility for which lies solely with Trump.

"All previous attempts [to kill Soleimani] failed ... that's why they did it this way," he said.

The Iraqi parliament is expected to vote on the expulsion some 5,200 U.S. troops from Iraq Sunday. Nasrallah said that even if MPs fail to approve the vote, Iraqi resistance fighters will not allow "a single U.S. soldier" to remain in the country.

Nasrallah devoted much of the first part of his speech to launch an attack on Trump, listing what he described as the president's "failures" in the region since he his election in 2016, including in wars in Yemen, Syria and Iraq.

He claimed that Trump's "real plan" in Iraq was to control the country's oil, weaken the Iraqi state and ensure the continuation of Daesh (ISIL) terrorist group.

Increased sanctions on Hezbollah officials in Lebanon, he said, has also failed to impact the power of "the resistance," as the group is often known.

(Source: Daily Star)

Fourteen killed in bomb attack on bus of school children in Burkina Faso

Fourteen people were killed and nine wounded in a bomb attack on a bus bringing children back from a school break in northern Burkina Faso Saturday, two security sources and a police source said.

It was not immediately clear who was responsible for the blast, which occurred in Sourou province near the border with Mali, or how many of the dead were children.

Extremist groups with links to al Qaeda and ISIL terrorist group have increased attacks in the area over the past two years despite international efforts to stamp them out.

Insurgents killed 35 mostly female civilians Dec. 24 after attacking a military outpost in Soum Province, also in the north. About 87 militants and local security forces were killed in the clash, authorities said.

Burkina has lost its reputation as a pocket of relative calm in the Sahel region as a homegrown insurgency has been amplified by a spillover of jihadist violence and crime from its chaotic northern neighbour Mali.

Attacks over the past year have killed hundreds and forced nearly a million people from their homes.

(Source: Reuters)

Is there going to be a war between Hezbollah and Tel Aviv?

➔ The security cabinet has become a play thing, and today has the least real impact on the army and military doctrine. The National Security Council has not cared about the security doctrine for a long time.

Pointing out that the regime faces an existential threat, the retired Israeli general stated that in recent years, Israel has been surrounded by big and small missiles. Today, there is a possibility of firing 1500-2000 missiles weighting 500-600 kg daily into military and strategic areas.

Brick added that we are not able to respond because Israel's air force and missiles cannot counter missile attacks. Israel's main enemy is Hezbollah, which has a great military capability.

Amos Harel, the military expert at Haaretz newspaper said that the Israeli army suffers from problems that regard ground operations as a nightmare, from which it is always trying to escape.

Harel quoted sources related to Tel Aviv as saying that the Gaza war in 2014 showed the capability of the Israeli army, the last stage of disappointing process that has begun with the 2006 Lebanese war.

According to Israeli sources, if a war be launched between Hezbollah and the Zionist regime, more than half of Israelis will flee to less dangerous areas.

This is while that the Zionist regime's economy will undergo significant problems due to factories shut down, power cut, water shortage and other war-related problems, even if other fronts be at good conditions.

In addition, Israelis are concern about offshore platforms and facilities, in particular the Tamar, Karish and Tanin gas fields, which are respectively located at 23, 40 and 10 km of the coast. The Zionists, who have incurred huge costs to support the gas platforms, are still deeply concerned.

The Zionist army has maintained its air superiority so far, but it does not perform well in terms of secret military infrastructure. The regime's air force may be able to destroy many of visible targets, but it cannot deal with the movements and armed groups that pursue attrition warfare and carry out covert movements.

The Israelis have no confidence in their military capability, and their stance indicates their horror of the power and capability of Lebanon's Hezbollah.

Ibrahimovic statue vandalized again

Zlatan Ibrahimovic's statue in his hometown of Malmo was vandalized overnight Saturday, Swedish police reported.

The statue has been the target of numerous attacks since the Swedish footballer invested in Stockholm-based Hammarby, angering supporters of Malmo FF, the club where he began his professional career.



In November, a day after his investment in Hammarby, Ibrahimovic filed a "hate crime" complaint after the statue was attacked with fire and paint and the word 'Judass' daubed across the front door of his Stockholm home.

In the latest incident the statue had collapsed against the barrier protecting it, its feet partially chopped off.

"A vandalism complaint has been lodged," a police spokesperson told AFP.

There are calls from local inhabitants for the statue outside Malmo's city stadium to be moved.

"I can understand that many people are disappointed in Zlatan's behavior but vandalizing a statue is simply unworthy. Better to express your dissatisfaction in a democratic way," Malmo deputy mayor Frida Trollmyr told AFP.

A citizens' initiative to move the sculpture will be considered in February, she added.

Ibrahimovic, 38, is set to make his debut for former club AC Milan in Serie A on Monday after signing a six-month contract with the former European champions last week.

(Source: Mirror)

NBA fines Wizards guard Thomas \$25K for bumping referee

Washington Wizards guard Isaiah Thomas was fined \$25,000 by the NBA on Saturday for inappropriate contact with a referee in a 122-103 home loss to Portland on Friday.

Thomas received a technical foul and was ejected for the incident, which took place 88 seconds into the first quarter.

The 30-year-old American was being double covered by Portland's Carmelo Anthony and Damian Lillard along the sideline. He battled for control of the ball with Anthony and moved forward, sticking his arm into the chest of referee Marat Kogut, who was standing out of bounds.

The play was reviewed by officials before the ejection was upheld.

Although the contact could have been Thomas trying to steady himself against Kogut rather than push the referee, it made no difference in enforcing rules designed to protect officials.

"He made physical contact with a referee," referee crew chief Mark Ayotte said after the game. "It was definitely just a push during the dead ball contact with the referee."

Kogut, 40, moved from Ukraine to the United States with his family seven days after he was born in Kiev.

Thomas, 30, is averaging 13.0 points and 4.4 assists a game for the Wizards, who at 10-24 are 5 1/2 games behind Orlando for the last playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

(Source: Eurosport)

Getafe's Cucurella denies racially abusing Real's Militao

Getafe midfielder Marc Cucurella has denied using racist language towards Real Madrid's Eder Militao during Saturday's 3-0 defeat by Zinedine Zidane's side in La Liga.

Cucurella released a statement on Twitter in response to reports he had used the word "mico", Spanish for monkey, during an altercation with the Brazilian defender, saying he had used the word "pico", Spanish slang for mouth.

The Spaniard, 21, wrote: "I would like clarify that at no point did I insult or belittle Militao. My words were 'Shut your mouth'. I wish to apologize if anyone felt offended by that.

"These are the only declarations I have made or will make on this matter."

Militao, who joined Real from Porto last year for a reported 40 million euros, did not make any comment on the incident. Real declined to comment.

(Source: Reuters)

Carter becomes first NBA player to appear in four decades

In August, Vince Carter made history when he agreed to a one-year contract to return to the Atlanta Hawks to play in his 22nd season, surpassing the members of the prodigious 21-season club (Dirk Nowitzki, Kevin Garnett, Kevin Willis and Robert Parish) as the longest-tenured NBA player.

But that wasn't the only major milestone on the table. According to Elias Sports Bureau research, when 42-year-old Carter stepped on the court Saturday night against the Indiana Pacers, he became the first NBA player to appear in a game in four different decades. The phrase "like a fine wine" comes to mind.

For context, 36 players who have played at least one minute in the NBA this season were born after Carter made his NBA debut, including Dallas Mavericks phenom Luka Doncic. It's also worth noting that the year Carter debuted (1999), the San Antonio Spurs and second-year player Tim Duncan won their first of five NBA titles, defeating the 8-seed New York Knicks in the Finals.

We're not going to say Vinsanity is like the Jennifer Lopez of the association, but just know we're thinking it.

Carter is one of only five remaining active players in the four major North American sports who debuted during the 1990s. The others? Adam Vinatieri (NFL), Patrick Marleau (NHL), Joe Thornton (NHL) and Zdeno Chara (NHL). Yep, the decade is officially five legends short of being reduced to an "I Love The '90s" VH1 special.

(Source: ESPN)

Sharapova urges Djokovic to match \$17,400 donation to Australia's bushfire relief

Maria Sharapova has pledged \$17,400 (25,000 AUD) to Australia's bushfire relief and urged Novak Djokovic to do the same.

The five-time grand slam champion becomes the latest of a host of tennis stars to donate to the cause after Australian Nick Kyrgios kick-started a wave of support from the sport earlier this week.

Wildfires have raged across Australia for months, killing 23 people and burning about 6 million hectares (23,000 square miles) of bushland.

Naval and air rescue operations were launched on Friday as mass evacuations of towns at risk of being engulfed by flames got underway.

"The month of January in Australia has been my home for the past 15 years," Sharapova wrote on Twitter.

"Watching the fires destroy the lands, its beautiful families and communities of animals is deeply (heartbreaking).

"I would like to begin my donation at 25K. @DjokerNole, would you match my donation?"

A shoulder injury last year has resulted in Sharapova slipping to No. 133 in the world rankings. The 32-year-old will compete in the Brisbane International which starts on Monday ahead of the Australian Open.

Ashleigh Barty, the top seed in Brisbane, will donate her winnings at the tournament



to the Australian Red Cross bushfire appeal.

The Australian, who won her first grand slam title at the French Open last year, had already donated \$20,850 (\$30,000 AUD) to the RSPCA to support wildlife affected by the fires at the end of last year, and would donate a further \$265,500 (\$382,000 AUD) were she to win in Brisbane.

"Wildlife has been lost but it has also

affected lives and homes so I have been sitting down and thinking with my team and family on ways we can help," Barty told reporters on Sunday.

"There have been really great initiatives from cricketers, tennis players, golfers, soccer players all over the country trying to help out."

Players this week started to pledge dona-

tions for each ace they hit during upcoming tournaments.

Kyrgios and compatriot Samantha Stosur promised \$140 (200 AUD) for every ace, while Alex de Minaur and John Millman chipped in with donations of \$175 (250 AUD) and \$70 (100 AUD) per ace respectively.

World No. 4 Simona Halep has agreed to use her coach as a means of raising money: "Well guys, you know I love Australia, but you also know I don't hit too many aces," she wrote on Twitter.

"Sooo I want to help and my pledge is this ... every time I give @darren_cahill a hard time in my box during all my matches in Aus, I will donate \$200.

"This way I will raise a lot more money."

Tennis Australia has pledged \$700,000 (1 million AUD) towards the repair of tennis facilities damaged by the fires, and the organization will also donate \$100 (70 USD) for every ace hit at the ATP Cup.

It will also hold a Rally for Relief exhibition match at Melbourne Park's Rod Laver Arena on January 15.

The bushfires have also forced the Canberra International, one of the tournaments that forms part of the buildup to the Australian Open, to be moved 600 kilometers west to the city of Bedgio.

(Source: CNN)

Immobile strikes for Lazio after insulted Balotelli scores for Brescia



Mario Balotelli warded off the insults from travelling Lazio fans to strike the first goal of the decade in Italy but the title-chasers hit back with a Ciro Immobile double to snatch a late win at ten-man Brescia on Sunday.

Simone Inzaghi's side stretched their winning streak to nine consecutive league games and with a game in hand are three points behind leaders Inter Milan and Juventus who play on Monday.

Immobile struck the winner after 91 minutes having also converted from the penalty spot before the break.

Felipe Caicedo had the ball in the back of the net early for Lazio off an Immobile cross but it was ruled offside.

But Italian international Balotelli picked up where he left off before the winter break opening the scoring after 18 minutes for the promoted side.

The 29-year-old pulled clear of Luiz Felipe to volley in his first home goal for Brescia and first of the decade.

He also scored the first goal of the previous decade in January 2010 with Inter Milan.

Balotelli was targeted by insulting chants from Lazio fans with the referee interrupting the game in the first half and an announcement made that play would be suspended if

they continued.

Brescia fans tried to drown out the insults with whistles and cheering which Balotelli applauded.

In November, Balotelli was the subject of monkey chants at Verona while Brescia president Massimo Cellino also came under fire after describing Balotelli's difficult situation at the promoted Serie A club as "black".

Relegation-threatened Brescia were hit after Andrea Cistana was sent off for a second yellow card after bringing down Caicedo just before the break.

And Serie A top scorer Immobile pulled Lazio back on level terms from the penalty spot on 42 minutes.

Lazio dominated the second half with Immobile bringing his league tally to 19 goals connecting with a Caicedo cross to fire in the injury time winner.

It was the 12th time this season that the team have scored a late winner.

Inzaghi meanwhile equals Sven Goran Eriksson's record of nine consecutive league wins set in the 1998-99 season.

"We will try to continue like this. We absolutely want to hit the Champions League," said Inzaghi.

(Source: Soccernet)

Near-death experience gives Naomi Osaka perspective



A "near-death" experience off the coast of the Turks and Caicos Islands has given reigning Australian Open champion Naomi Osaka a new perspective heading into the 2020 season.

An upbeat Osaka told reporters ahead of the season-opening Brisbane International that she had tried to have a bit of fun and experience new things during the off-season, which meant her "first vacation ever".

"It was really fun -- my sister was there. She made me paddleboard, and then the current took us and I almost died," a smiling Osaka said.

Osaka said she and her sister had been in shallow waters but she noticed a current had taken them away from the shore.

"I'm like, how far out are you trying to take us, because it's black, like, the water is black now, and the house is like a tiny dot, and I can't really swim that well," she said.

"I just feel like I'm experiencing so many things in my life and everything's really fun and I'm trying to take it all into... perspective that these are things that I've never thought I was going to

be able to do."

Osaka, 22, burst onto the scene in 2018 when she beat Serena Williams to win the US Open, then followed that up by winning the 2019 Australian Open.

The Japanese star reached number one on the world rankings in 2019 and finished the year at number three, behind Australia's Ash Barty and Czech Karolina Pliskova.

She said a sore shoulder meant she had not spent as much time on the court in the off-season as in previous years.

"I didn't play for most of November, which was a first for me," she said.

"I've never really taken that long of a break before. But I think it was really necessary because my shoulder was kind of worn down.

"But after that, I just did rehab and slowly started playing again and I think that that worked out really well because I don't feel anything in my shoulder, and I like to think that I'm playing well right now."

Osaka opens her Brisbane International campaign against world number 23 Maria Sakkari of Greece.

(Source: AFP)

Barca strike was planned, says Wu Lei as China hails Espanyol hero

Espanyol's Wu Lei became the first Chinese footballer to score against Barcelona on Saturday and has revealed how the goal that went viral was planned while he was warming up.

Wu earned Espanyol a dramatic 2-2 draw at the RCDE Stadium after he fired in an 88th-minute equalizer to salvage a point in the all-Catalan clash of La Liga's top against bottom.

The 28-year-old drove decisively past Barcelona's stand-in goalkeeper Neto and into the far corner but his goal owed much to a brilliant reverse pass too, executed by his team-mate Matias Vargas.

Both players had been introduced by new coach Abelardo Fernandez in the second half and Wu said after the match that Vargas had predicted he would give him a chance.

"I am very happy, not just because I scored but because of that assist," Wu told Espanyol TV.

"When we were warming up, Matias told me he was going to put me in with a through ball. After 10 minutes he played one to me and I scored."

Chinese media on Sunday declared the strike as heralding "a new chapter" in Chinese football while one related hashtag generated 370 million views on social media platform Weibo.

"Wu has now become the first Chinese player to score against Barcelona in all competitions ever," state-run China Global Television Network (CGTN) said.

The 28-year-old Wu "single-handedly revitalized Espanyol" against the Spanish champions, CGTN continued.

"A new chapter in history has been opened," it added. "For Wu, it was a night that will live long in the memory."

State news agency Xinhua said Wu's dramatic leveller from a narrow angle "sparked a wave of praise from media



and fans in China".

Wu joined in the celebrations by writing on Weibo: "Wonderful night, a new year, a good start."

Chinese Maradona

The forward, dubbed the "Chinese Maradona" as a youngster, joined Espanyol from Shanghai SIPG in January last year and after finishing top scorer in the Chinese Super League, he said he wanted to prove the country's players could deliver at the highest level.

"Pressure is my driving force, it's what pushes me forward," he said last year.

"I want to show fans around the world that there are players in China who can shine in the best leagues in the world."

He has stayed true to his word and more than justified his modest transfer fee of 2 million euros.

After making his debut at the start of February, Wu missed only one game for his new club through to the end of last season, playing 21 times and scoring four goals.

This term, he has been even more effective, scoring six goals in 28 appearances in all competitions, despite Espanyol's poor form that has them languishing at the bottom of the La Liga table.

Yet Abelardo's appointment seems to have revitalized the team and Wu believes their stirring performance against Barcelona can now be a turning-point in their fight against relegation.

"After the game in the dressing room, you could see everyone's confidence was up," Wu said.

"It feels like we are going to change the whole dynamic this year. Hopefully in the next game we can get the victory because we are gaining momentum."

"We thank all the fans who supported us because they give us unity. We are all a family together."

China's new coach Li Tie will also hope Wu's form can help rescue the country's hopes of reaching the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. They sit second in their qualifying group after four games, eight points behind Syria.

"He is currently the only Chinese player in one of the five major football leagues," said Li Tie in his first press conference in charge on Sunday.

(Source: Guardian)

Iran coach predicts bright future for women volleyballers

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Women's volleyball coach Mitra Shabanian has predicted a bright future for the Iranian team.

Team Melli have traveled to Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand on Saturday to compete at the 2020 Women's Asian Olympic Qualification Tournament.

Iran have been drawn in Pool B along with Indonesia, South Korea and Kazakhstan.

Pool A consists of Chinese Taipei, Australia and Thailand.

The top two of each pool advance to crosswise semifinals, followed by the deciding match and the winners will qualify to the 2020 women's Olympic volleyball tournament.

"I believe in these young players because we're talking about a generation that can make a change in our volleyball. We are going to improve with our young and experienced players. I have already said this is our second team. The team have an average age of 20 years and average height of 181 centimeters," Shabanian said.

"We've finished in seventh and eighth place in the previous editions but I hope that we come in a better place in the near future. They are here to make it happen. If we discover our talented players and they get investment at just the right time, I have no doubt we can shine in the continent in the future," she added.

The 2020 Women's Asian Olympic Qualification Tournament is a volleyball tournament for women's national teams organized by Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC) and Fédération Internationale de Volleyball (FIVB), and will be held in Nakhon Ratchasima, Thailand from Jan. 7 to 12, 2020.



Gabriel Calderon threatens to cancel contract with Persepolis



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Argentinian coach Gabriel Calderon has threatened Persepolis to cancel his contract after the Iranian club failed to pay his latest wages on time.

Calderon, who is spending his vacation in Argentina, has sent a letter to the Iranian club and has given notice to terminate his contract.

He has had many quarrels with the Persepolis's officials after was appointed as the team's head coach in July. Calderon replaced Branko

Ivankovic in the Iranian popular football team.

Last month, Italian coach Andrea Stramaccioni parted company with Esteghlal after the Iranian football club failed to transfer his salary over the U.S. sanctions.

Now, Calderon is going to follow in Stramaccioni's footsteps.

Persepolis, who sit top of the Iran Professional League, are going to win the league for the fourth successive time.

The Reds also are favorites to defend their title in Hazfi Cup.

Yahya Golmohammadi close to Team Melli hot seat



S P O R T S TEHRAN — Ex-Iran captain Yahya Golmohammadi has moved one step closer to becoming Team Melli coach.

Golmohammadi is currently heading Iranian top flight football team Padideh. With less than three months remaining until the restart of the 2022 FIFA World Cup qualification, the Iranian federation has not introduced the new head coach.

Marc Wilmots left his role as coach of Team Melli in early December, just seven months after replacing Carlos Queiroz at the

helm of the three-time Asian champions. Wilmots's assistant Vahid Hashemi-an also is among the candidates to lead Team Melli.

Iran football federation had already announced that it has reached an agreement with former Persepolis coach Branko Ivankovic but it seems the federation has changed the decision.

Team Melli will entertain Hong Kong on March 26 in Tehran and will meet Cambodia five days later in an away match.

Iran will face Bahrain and Iraq on June 4 and 9 in Tehran.

Qassem Soleimani's family awarded Pahlevani armband

S P O R T S TEHRAN — Pahlevani armband, called 'Bazouband' in Persian, was awarded to family of Commander of IRGC Quds Force Major General Qassem Soleimani on Sunday.

In the ceremony held in the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs headquarters, sports minister Masoud Soltanifar awarded the armband to General Qassem Soleimani's family.

Chief of IRGC's Sarallah Headquarters Brigadier General Esmail Kosari and head of Iran's National Olympic Committee (NOC) Reza Salehi Amiri were among attendees.

Commander of the IRGC Quds Force Major General Qassem Soleimani was martyred in an airstrike at Baghdad's



international airport on Friday morning.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei declared three days of public mourning in the country.

Iran's Ministry of Sport had announced that the all competition which are scheduled for Saturday and Sunday were canceled.

General Soleimani was at frontline positions in battles against ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

General Soleimani and Deputy Commander of the Iraqi Popular Mobilization Forces (Hashd al-Shaabi) Abu Mahdi Al-Mohandes, who were separately leaving Baghdad airport in two cars were targeted and assassinated early hours of morning on Friday.

NBA coach accuses Mike Pence of lying about Soleimani's involvement in 9/11

Steve Kerr did not hesitate to make his thoughts known on President Donald Trump's killing of Iranian general Qassem Soleimani.

The Golden State Warriors head coach tweeted Friday that Vice President Mike Pence lied about claims of General Qassem Soleimani's involvement with the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and retweeted several posts condemning the airstrike.

Among Kerr's retweets are posts calling the attack a "potentially catastrophic" blunder, denouncing a possible war with Iran and criticizing pundits who supported the Iraq war.

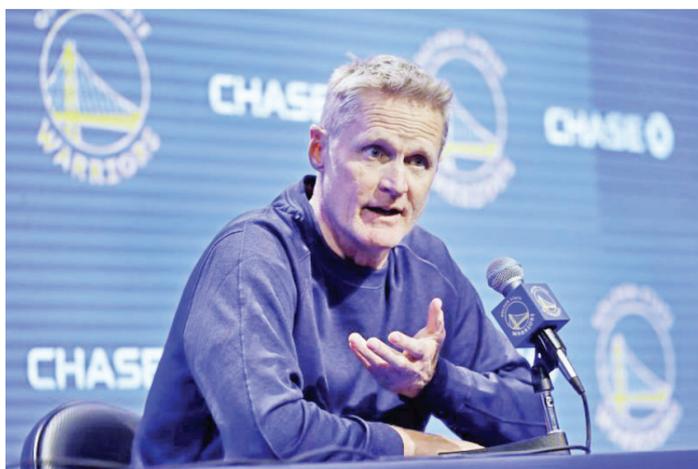
On Saturday, Kerr detailed his perspective on the attack with reporters, warning against an "unwinnable, unnecessary" war. A transcript of Kerr's comments:

I just follow what's going on in the world because it's always of great interest to me. I'm worried we're going to end up in another war. I try to use my Twitter platform to remind people to do their homework before we all blindly wave the flag and get ourselves into another mess like we did in Iraq.

[Before the Iraq war] I remember the patriotic fever that swept the NBA. Since that time, we do a great job in our league and the other leagues supporting our veterans, bringing them to games and giving them ovations, which I wholeheartedly support. But what I think would be even more supportive is to not get involved, not send soldiers overseas to unwinnable, unnecessary wars in the first place. That's how we can best support our men and women who are representing us.

We have a history in this country all you have to do is read Vietnam, Iraq, people are misled by our government. It happened in Vietnam, we know that. The facts were not facts. We have to be very careful right now with what we're being told. If we're led into another war, the implications for so many families, so many people are so drastic that we all need to understand what's happening and support our troops by making sure we press our government to do the right thing.

One of the most politically outspoken figures in the sports world, Kerr grew up in the Middle East and lost his father to an

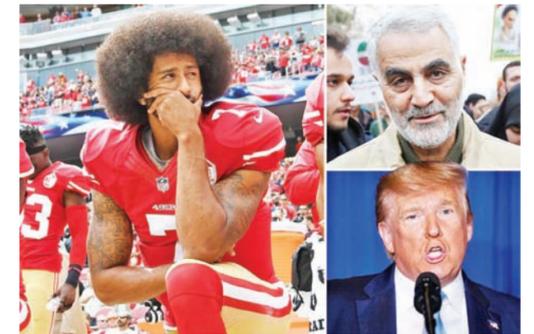


assassination in the region. Kerr has recalled his father's death to denounce the potential

blowback of Trump's policies in the past. (source: Foxnews.com)

Former NFL quarterback Kaepernick blasts Donald Trump

Former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick tweeted that 'there is nothing new about American terrorist attacks' just a day after it was revealed that Iranian General Qassem Soleimani was martyred by the U.S. airstrike.



'There is nothing new about American terrorist attacks against Black and Brown people for the expansion of American imperialism,' Kaepernick tweeted Saturday.

In a separate tweet, he wrote: 'America has always sanctioned and besieged Black and Brown bodies both at home and abroad. America militarism is the weapon wielded by American imperialism, to enforce its policing and plundering of the non white world.'

Although he didn't specifically refer to Soleimani's death early Friday morning in Baghdad, it's assumed that the incident is what prompted him to tweet for the first time in 2020.

(Source: Daily Mail)

Safdarian wins silver at Ice Climbing World Cup

TASNIM — Mohammad Reza Safdarian from Iran finished in second place at the 2019-2020 UIAA Ice Climbing World Cup on Sunday.

The competition kicked off on Friday in Changchun, capital city of northeast China's Jilin province.

France's climber Louna Ladevant won the title with 15,330 points in the Men's Lead.

Safdarian came second with 14,302 points and bronze medal went to South Korean climber Heeyong Park who scored 14,301 points.

Founded in 2002, the Ice Climbing World Cup is the highest-level event of the sport, consisting of four events, namely the men's and women's speed races and difficult races.

China's leg this year attracted nearly 80 athletes from 16 countries and regions, including China, Iran, the United States, Canada, Russia and France.

Bonyan Diesel named Gen. Qassem Soleimani stadium

TASNIM — Bonyan Diesel Stadium has been changed to General Qassem Soleimani Stadium on Sunday.

The name of soccer-specific Bonyan Diesel Stadium, which belongs to Machine Sazi football club, has been changed in tribute to General Qassem Soleimani.

The revered General and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), were martyred in US airstrikes in the Iraqi capital Baghdad early Friday.

Iran's Ministry of Sports had already announced that all nationwide sporting events which are scheduled for the Saturday and Sunday have been cancelled because of martyrdom of General Soleimani.

Oman's Al Habsi announces international retirement

Legendary Oman goalkeeper Ali Al Habsi announced his retirement from international football on Saturday, having made his national team debut more than 18 years ago.

The 38-year-old Al Habsi is considered one Asia's best goalkeepers and is the only Omani to have played club football in England and Norway.



After starting his football career with home town club Al Mudhaibi in 1998, Al Habsi made several appearances for Al Nasr before making a bold move to join Norwegian outfit Lyn.

His impressive performances in Norway earned him a place with English club Bolton Wanderers before playing for Wigan, Brighton & Hove Albion and Reading.

He then moved to Saudi Arabia, where he joined Al Hilal SFC before returning to England last August to play for West Bromwich Albion.

Al Habsi featured in three AFC Asian Cup Finals for Oman and he helped them win the 2009 Gulf Cup title. He was named best goalkeeper in five editions of the regional tournament and retires with 135 international caps to his name.

(Source: the-afc)

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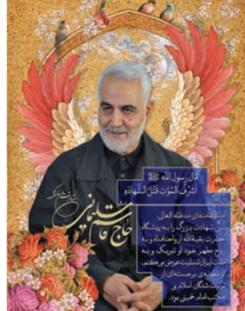
GUIDE TO SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

If a believer enrages his co-religionist brother, he causes separation between himself and him.

Imam Ali (AS)

Iranian artists creating works on Martyr Soleimani

TEHRAN — The director of Art Bureau's Visual Arts Office, Masud Shojaei-Tabataba'i, said on Sunday that a number of Iranian artists are creating artworks of commander Qassem Soleimani in a project initiated by the organization.



An artwork created for an Art Bureau's project, which is planned to commemorate Martyr Qassem Soleimani.

About 30 painters, graphic designers and sculptors, including Mehdi Farrokhi, Ahmad Qolizadeh, Kamiar Sadeqi, Shahram Shirzadi, Abbas Ganji, Nasser Seifi and Malek-Dadyar Garusian, are collaborating on the project.

Painter Hassan Ruholamin's painting "The Apocalyptic Companion of Aba Abdillah", which depicts Soleimani's remains embraced by Imam Hussein (AS), the third Imam of the Shias, is one of the artworks created for the project.

An image of the artwork was published on Friday on khamenei.ir, the official website of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

The artworks being created for the project are scheduled to be showcased in exhibitions, which will be organized across the country in the near future.

Instagram suspends Iran's Fajr Film Festival account over posts on commander Soleimani

TEHRAN — The Fajr Film Festival, Iran's major film event, announced on Sunday that Instagram has suspended the festival's account over posts expressing sympathy for the martyrdom of Quds Force commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani by a U.S. air raid in Baghdad.



An image depicting Fajr Film Festival's Instagram after suspension.

Instagram accounts of several Iranian celebrities and ordinary people were also suspended for the same reason.

In posts published on other social networks, the celebrities and cultural organizations have said that Instagram's decision to suspend the accounts has violated their basic right to freedom of expression.

Earlier last year, Instagram suspended the accounts of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, the commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Major General Mohammad-Ali Jafari and the IRGC Ground Force Commander Brigadier General Mohammad Pakpur.

NEWS IN BRIEF



Tehran cultural center renamed after Martyr Soleimani

TEHRAN — The Baharan Cultural Center in Tehran's District 17 has been renamed after Quds Force Commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

The decision to rename the center was made by the director of the Art and Cultural Organization of the Tehran Municipality, Hojjatolislam Meisam Amrudi.

He announced the news during a meeting with the Representative of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Nasser Abu Sharif, in Tehran, Tehran.

Books recount stories about Qassem Soleimani

TEHRAN — Only a few desk books have so far been published in Iran that directly recount stories about Qassem Soleimani, one of the country's most powerful figures who was martyred in Iraq in a U.S. airstrike.

"Hajji Qassem" came out in 2016 as the first book, which contains his memories of the 1980s Iran-Iraq war and some other topics compiled by Ali-Akbar Mozdabadi. It also carries some articles published about Soleimani by several international studies centers.

The book was published by Ya Zahra Publications, which then announced its plan to release a two-volume series of Soleimani's accounts of some of Iran's military operations during the Iran-Iraq war.

"The Attack on Invasion" was the first book of the series, which describes Iran's military actions during the early days of the war.

"The Battle of Seyyed Jaber", the second book of the series, was released in 2017. The book tells about the role played by the Sarallah Brigade, Soleimani's unit, during Operation Beit-ul-Muqaddas in 1982. Both of the books were compiled by Abbas Mirzai.

In 2016, Se Noqteh publishing company released "The Soldiers of the Commander" authored by Morteza Keramati. In the first chapter, the writer gives an account of Soleimani's leadership as the Quds Force commander. The second chapter carries the memories of his soldiers in the fight against the ISIS terrorists in Syria and Iraq.

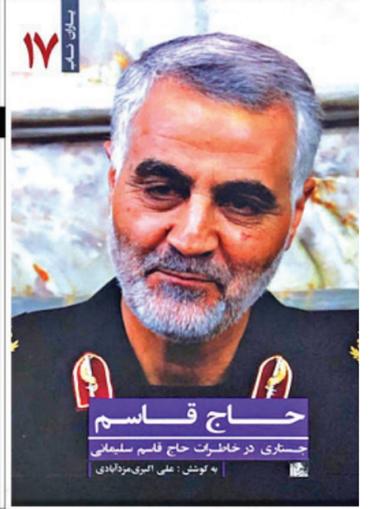
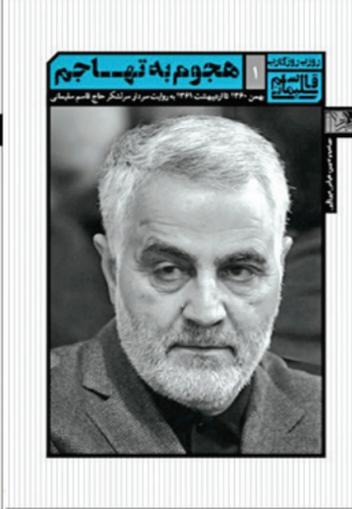
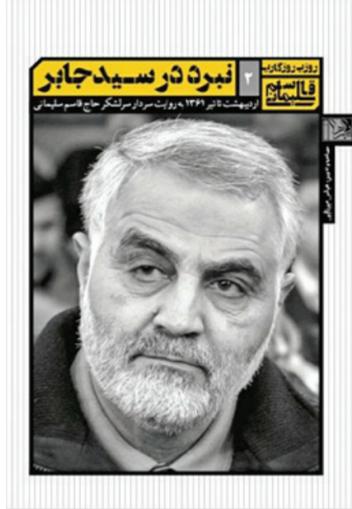
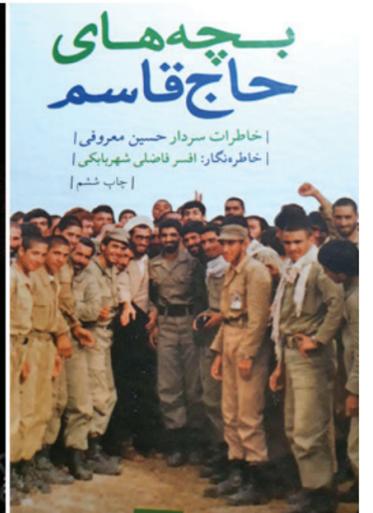
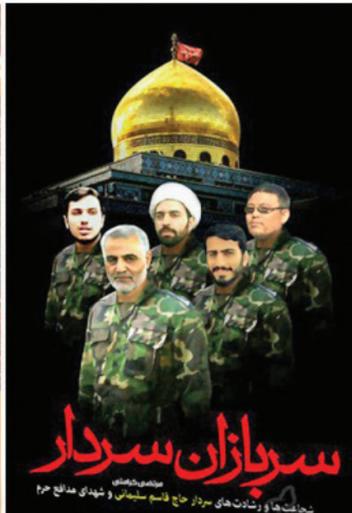
Mozdabadi also accumulated some other of his memories of various subjects, which were published in "Zolfaqar" a few months ago.

Other books, including "Men of Hajji Qassem", also have made direct reference or allusion to the commander.

In the book, Hossein Marufi, a commander of a squadron in the Sarallah Brigade, recounts his memories of the war and 26 months of captivity.

Soleimani also wrote a preface to "The Entry-Forbidden Commanders", which is a compilation of stories from 30 Iranian commanders by Rahim Makhdumi.

He also wrote a commendation for Hamid Hesam's book "When the Moonlight Was Missing", which carries the memories of veteran Ali Khoshlafz who was seriously wounded in the Iran-Iraq war.



This combination photo shows covers of books about Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani.

Tehran's Art Bureau holds memorial service for Martyr Soleimani



A number of artists and cultural figures attend a memorial service for Quds Force commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani at Tehran's Art Bureau on January 4, 2020. (Mehr/Mohammad Mohsenifar)

TEHRAN — Tehran's Art Bureau held a memorial service on Saturday for Quds Force commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani who was martyred in a U.S. air raid in Baghdad on Friday.

The ceremony was attended by a large number of artists, cineastes, poets and the commander's companions.

Speaking at the ceremony, Kurosh Zarei, the director of the bureau's Center for Dramatic Arts said, "The commander belonged to all the peace-seeking people in the world, and today they are saddened by the great loss of the martyr."

The director of the music center of the bureau, Milad Erfanpur, also recited a poem in memory of the commander.

Homayun Amirzadeh, Soleimani's companion during the 1980s Iran-Iraq war, said, "The commander's popularity does not belong to today or yesterday, it is rooted in the Sacred Defense (Iran-Iraq war) era."

Hojjatolislam Ali Shirazi, the representative of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei in the Quds Force, also called Soleimani an artist and said, "He always deemed himself a soldier, and today, the whole country of Iran is in tears for him."

"People saw honesty in him. When he announced the elimination of Daesh, nobody had doubts about him because they believed in him. When he used to say that he loved the children of the martyrs, he really felt the pain of the martyrs' children. They all used to call him father or uncle," he said.

Deputy Culture Minister for Artistic Affairs Seyyed Mojtaba Hosseini, Rudaki Foundation Managing Director Ali-Akbar Safipur, filmmakers Reza Mirkarimi and Shahram Karami, and writers Habib Ahmadzadeh and Mostafa Rahmandost were among the artists attending the memorial ceremony.

Thespians to perform plays in memory of commander Soleimani



Thespians perform "Like a Fish on Land" by director Kurosh Zarei at Imam Ali Mosalla in Kerman on February 24, 2019. (Tasnim/Mohammad-Javad Kianinia)

TEHRAN — Iranian troupes plan to perform some street theater in memory of Quds Force chief Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, who was martyred in a U.S. airstrike in Baghdad, in a program arranged by the Art Bureau.

"The plays will be performed across the country during the 40th day of mourning for the martyrdom of the commander," Kurosh Zarei, the director of bureau's Center for Dramatic Arts said in a press release on Sunday.

He pointed to his play "Like a Fish on Land", which was produced by the Art Bureau last year and said, "Martyr Soleimani was a hidden character in the play."

The play was about the soldiers of Islamic Revolution Guards Corps' Sarallah Division 41, which was led by Soleimani during the 1980s Iran-Iraq war.

"The play also focused on the 175 Iranian

divers who were buried alive in scattered mass graves in Iraq," said Zarei who was the director of the play.

"However, we are planning to restage the play to put the spotlight on the character of the commander in the play this year," he noted.

Zarei expressed his hope that the cultural organizations step up to support the play this year to enable better performances of "Like a Fish on Land".

The skeletons of the divers were unearthed by an excavation team in early June, 2015. Most of the skeletons were discovered handcuffed with wire with no sign of execution.

The divers were members of a shock troop squad, which crossed the Arvand River to overrun Umm al Rassas, a nearby island on the Shatt-al-Arab waterway, during the Operation Karbala 4 on December 25, 1986. However, they were captured by Iraqi forces.

Sundance Film Festival aims for more movie critic diversity

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — A Sundance Film Festival program designed to increase diversity among media members covering the annual event in Park City boomed in popularity in the initiative's second year.

For this year's festival, 51 journalists were selected out of a pool of 319 applicants to receive travel stipends provided in the program, The Salt Lake Tribune reports. The chosen writers are women, minorities, and people with disabilities.

The festival runs Jan. 23-Feb. 2.

Sundance officials created the Press Inclusion Program in 2018 after a study by USC Annenberg's Inclusion Initiative that two-thirds of movie critics were white men.

Movie blogger Rendy Jones was among the participants in the inaugural program last year. The 21-year-old black and nonbinary writer from New York called it an "amazing" experience and the highlight of his year.

"I met so many different people from different fields — industry and filmmakers," Jones said.

Jones missed the deadline to apply this year and briefly

panicked, but raised enough money from a GoFundMe account to pay for airfare and rideshares from Salt Lake City, where he's staying with a friend, up to Park City. He runs a website called Rendy Reviews.

Sundance officials said they are looking for ways to improve the program, including moving up the application process so people who aren't selected have more time to make alternate arrangements.

Netflix and the movie review website Rotten Tomatoes are among organizations backing the initiative.