

TEHRAN (Tasnim) -- Remains of 60 Iranian troops unearthed in Iraq more than three decades after the end of an imposed war on Iran in the 1980s were repatriated from the Arab country on Wednesday. In a ceremony at Khosravi border crossing west of Iran, 60 coffins draped in the Iranian flag were handed over to Iranian officials and then transferred to the city of Qasr-e-Shirin. A number of Iranian and Iraqi officials took part in the ceremony, during which the bodies of 80 Iraqi soldiers found in former battlefields were also handed over to Iraqi authorities.

TEHRAN (Press TV) -- Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Qasemi on Wednesday dismissed as ludicrous a recent U.S. allegation that Iranian embassies were involved in terror attacks in Europe. Qasemi rejected the allegation made by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo as baseless, preposterous and part of a targeted propaganda campaign and psychological warfare against the activities of the Iranian embassies, which he said were in line with international conventions and aimed at promoting bilateral friendly relations with other countries.

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World Has Failed Rohingya Facing Ethnic Cleansing

By: António Guterres*

UNITED NATIONS -- Small children butchered in front of their parents. Girls and women gang-raped while family members were tortured and killed. Villages burned to the ground.

Nothing could have prepared me for the bone-chilling accounts I heard last week in Bangladesh from Rohingya refugees who had fled widespread killings and violence in Rakhine state, Myanmar.

One man, a member of this mostly Muslim ethnic group, broke down in tears describing how his eldest son was shot dead in front of him, the man's mother was brutally murdered and his house was torched to ashes. He said he took refuge in a mosque but was discovered by soldiers who abused him and burned the Qur'an.

These victims of what has been rightly called ethnic cleansing are suffering an anguish that can only stir a visitor's heartbreak and anger. Their horrific experiences defy comprehension, yet they are the reality for nearly 1 million Rohingya refugees.

The Rohingya have suffered a pattern of persecution — lacking even the most basic human rights, starting with citizenship — by their own country, Myanmar.

Systematic human rights abuses by the security forces in Myanmar over the past year were designed to instill terror in the Rohingya population, leaving them with a dreadful choice: stay on in fear of death or leave everything simply to survive.

After a harrowing journey to safety, these refugees are now trying to cope with the harsh conditions in the Bangladesh district of Cox's Bazar that have naturally resulted from the world's fastest-growing refugee crisis.

Bangladesh is a developing country with resources stretched to the limits. Yet, while larger and wealthier countries around the world are closing doors to outsiders, the government and people of Bangladesh have opened their borders and hearts to the Rohingya.

The compassion and generosity of the Bangladeshi people show the best of humanity and have saved many thousands of lives.

But the response to this crisis must be a global one.

A Global Compact on Refugees is being finalized by member states of the United Nations so front-line countries such as Bangladesh are not alone in responding to a fleeing wave of humanity.

For now, however, the United Nations and humanitarian agencies are working flat-out alongside the refugees themselves and host communities to improve conditions. But far more resources are desperately needed to avert disaster and to give fuller expression to the principle that a refugee crisis calls for a global sharing of responsibility.

An international humanitarian appeal for almost \$1 billion is funded at only 26%. This shortfall means that malnutrition prevails in the camp. It means that access to water and sanitation is far from ideal. It means that we cannot provide basic education for refugee children. Not least, it means inadequate measures to alleviate the immediate monsoon risk.

Makeshift homes hastily built by the refugees on arrival are now threatened by mudslides, requiring urgent action to find alternative sites and build stronger shelters.

Much has been done to address the challenge, but there are still grave risks because of the sheer dimensions of the crisis.

I traveled to Bangladesh with World Bank President Jim Yong Kim and welcome his leadership in mobilizing the bank's announcement of \$480 million in grant-based support to Rohingya refugees and their hosts. Yet far more is required from the international community.

Expressions of solidarity are not enough; the Rohingya people need genuine assistance.

Despite all they endured in Myanmar, the refugees I met in Cox's Bazar have not given up hope. "We need security in Myanmar and citizenship. And we want justice for what our sisters, our daughters, our mothers have suffered," one distraught but determined woman told me as she gestured to a mother cradling her young baby, the result of rape.

The crisis will not be solved overnight. At the same time, the situation cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely.

Myanmar must create the conditions for the return of the refugees with full rights and the promise of living in safety and dignity. This requires a massive investment — not only in reconstruction and development for all communities in one of Myanmar's poorest regions, but also in reconciliation and respect for human rights.

Unless the root causes of the violence in Rakhine state are addressed comprehensively, misery and hatred will continue to fuel conflict. The Rohingya people cannot become forgotten victims. We must answer their clear appeals for help with action.

*António Guterres is secretary-general of the United Nations.

Velayati in Moscow: Ties With Russia 'Strategic'



Ali Akbar Velayati, senior Advisor to Leader of the Islamic Revolution, speaks to an IRIB reporter in Moscow July 11, with Iran's ambassador to Russia Mehdi Sanaei, left, on his side.

MOSCOW (Dispatches) -- A top adviser to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei hailed Iran's "strategic relationship" with Russia on Wednesday during a visit to Moscow, part of a diplomatic offensive by Tehran as it braces for renewed U.S. sanctions.

Ali Akbar Velayati, who was due to meet President Vladimir Putin, also took a swipe at U.S. President Donald Trump, saying his "unreliable" actions made Tehran's close

ties with Moscow all the more necessary.

The United States pulled out of a multinational deal in May to lift sanctions against Iran in return for curbs to its nuclear program. Washington says it will reimpose sanctions and has told other countries to halt all imports of Iranian oil from Nov. 4 or face U.S. financial measures.

"The relationship between Iran and the Russian Federation is a strategic relationship and in recent

years the collective bilateral and regional relations have expanded," Iran's ISNA news agency quoted Velayati as saying on arrival in Moscow.

He said he would deliver messages to Putin from Ayatollah Khamenei and President Hassan Rouhani and that they would discuss the "very sensitive" global situation.

Velayati cited Russian and Iranian cooperation in Syria, where they both support President Bashar al-Assad's forces in the seven-year

war against what the Iranian official called "terrorism and its sponsors".

"Only a strategic and long-term relationship (with Russia) can continue this cooperation," said Velayati, who was also due to meet Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak in Moscow.

Velayati described Trump as an "unreliable individual... with relation to international law who necessitates more and more cooperation" between Iran and Russia.

A U.S. State Department official said this month that Washington's goal was to get as many countries as possible down to zero Iranian oil imports. However, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Tuesday the United States might consider requests from some countries to be exempted from sanctions.

Apart from the United States, the other signatories to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal - Russia, China, Germany, France and Britain - have said they still support the accord.

But European firms are reluctant to risk far-reaching U.S. financial penalties they would face for doing business in Iran.

The occupying regime of Israel's PM Benjamin Netanyahu was also visiting Moscow on Wednesday. Asked about Netanyahu's visit, Velayati said: "His presence or absence in Russia has no effect on our strategic mission in Moscow."

Velayati is also expected to visit China in the near future, Iran's Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday.

Terrorists Told: Idlib Next to Liberate

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) -- Russian officials warned so-called Free Syrian Army (FSA) negotiators in Dara'a that they plan to launch an attack on the northern Syrian province of Idlib in September, an FSA spokesman told the SMART news agency.

The apparent warning came as Syrian army troops laid siege to remaining FSA-held pockets in Dara'a City as they were poised to gain complete control after weeks of fighting.

The Syrian army was also consolidating its grip over the border area with Jordan to the east of the city, after taking control of the Nassib border crossing, a key trade route, last week.

Once backed by the West and Jordan, FSA militants agreed to a surrender deal on 6 July, handing over much of the area they had held for the past seven years along with their arms to the government.

According to Ibrahim Jibawi, a spokesman for the FSA's Southern Front Central Operations Room, the Russians advised

militants during a meeting in the Dara'a province town of Busra al-Sham not to continue north after Dara'a.

"There was a warning by the Russians for the Free Army not to go to Idlib...." After Dara'a, we'll go to Idlib," Jibawi told SMART.

An FSA military commander was also quoted as telling the news agency that the terrorists were now fortifying their bases in Idlib in anticipation of a new offensive.

The return of Dara'a to the government's complete control would deal a psychological blow to terrorists since the city came to epitomize the early sedition in 2011 that spread across Syria and touched off a cycle of foreign-backed terrorism as terrorists from around the world trickled in.

Since the Dara'a offensive started on 19 June, almost 200,000 have returned to their towns, now areas held by the Syrian army, after Jordan shut its border crossing and declared that it would not host more Syrian refugees.

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How Mercenaries Power UAE Military

LOS ANGELES (Middle East Eye) -- In California's Mojave Desert last year, an American man wearing a helmet and body armor stood in front of a line of rifle-toting Emirati troops who were in the United States for military training.

"My name is General Stephen A. Toumajan," he tells the camera in a distinctly American accent, his thumbs gripping the sides of his heavy bullet-proof vest. "I'm the commanding general for the Joint Aviation Command in, uh, UAE."

He did not misspeak: Gen Toumajan, a former lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army, is the commanding officer of the United Arab Emirates' military helicopter branch. He wears the UAE's uniform, gives orders to Emirati troops and - when he meets with American counterparts - is identified as a general of a foreign force.

At war in Yemen - and with aspirations of becoming a dominant land, air and sea power in the Middle East - the UAE is leaning heavily on foreign expertise to trans-

form and guide its military.

From commanders like Toumajan to mercenaries and trainers, foreigners have been central to the rise of the UAE's military.

"All Persian Gulf military forces employ many foreigners, but in the UAE there is a different, more effective military outcome," said David Roberts, an assistant professor at King's College London and an expert on Persian Gulf affairs.

Toumajan is not the only foreign commander in the UAE's armed forces.

Australian Mike Hindmarsh heads the UAE's Presidential Guard, which is considered to be among the most elite fighting forces in the Arab world today and is active in Yemen.

The role Toumajan and Hindmarsh play is not exactly clear.

The Presidential Guard is said to lead the UAE's deployment in Yemen and Hindmarsh is believed to answer directly to Abu Dhabi's crown prince Muhammad bin Zayed.

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