

UN condemns Iran execution spree, worried about minorities

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Fri, 2021-01-29 18:35

DUBAI: The United Nations human rights office on Friday condemned an alleged spree of 28 executions in Iran, including several prisoners from minority groups, and called on Tehran to halt the hanging of an ethnic Baluchi man. Iran has often faced criticism from world bodies and Western human rights group for its rights record and high number of executions – the world’s highest after China, according to Amnesty International. Tehran has dismissed the criticism as baseless and due to a lack of understanding of its laws. “#Iran: We strongly condemn the series of executions – at least 28 – since mid-December, including of people from minority groups,” the UN human rights office said on Twitter.

“We urge the authorities to halt the imminent execution of Javid Dehghan, to review his and other death penalty cases in line with human rights law,” it added.

There was no immediate official Iranian reaction to the UN statement on Friday, the weekend in the country.

Dehghan was sentenced to death after being convicted “following a grossly unfair trial” of belonging to an armed group and involvement in an ambush that killed two Revolutionary Guards, Amnesty International said.

“The court relied on torture-tainted ‘confessions’ and ignored the serious due process abuses committed by Revolutionary Guards agents and prosecution authorities during the investigation process,” Amnesty said.

Iran’s Sistan-Baluchestan province borders on Afghanistan, the world’s biggest producer of opium, and Pakistan. The area has long been plagued by unrest from drug smuggling gangs and separatist militants. The population of the province is mostly Sunni Muslim, while the majority of Iranians are Shi’ites.

On Thursday, state media said an Iranian member of Daesh was executed in southwestern Khuzestan province, home to many of Iran’s ethnic Arabs, for taking part in an attack that killed two paramilitary Basij militiamen.



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[Tripoli burns while officials swap accusations](#)

Fri, 2021-01-29 21:53

BEIRUT: The riots that have accompanied the protests in Tripoli for several days, and which led to the burning of the municipal building on Thursday night, have shocked the Lebanese public and officials., but not enough to force politicians to cooperate on forming a new government.

Rioting escalated on Thursday night, when protestors launched Molotov cocktails, hand grenades and stones at the security forces, who attacked protesters with tear gas and rubber and live bullets.

People in Tripoli awoke on Friday morning to the damage caused by overnight clashes. The Lebanese Army Command said: "Three people have been arrested, including a Syrian, for participating in acts of vandalism and starting a fire. Another two were arrested for participating in the riots and keeping the civil defense firefighters from getting to the building."

Protesters have been in the streets since Sunday to oppose the extension of the country's lockdown which was introduced without compensation for those affected by the closures.

Tripoli has a population of over 750,000, with 23 percent living on less than two dollars a day.

Fears prevailed that these riots would spread to other cities and drag the army into mobile clashes, that have already killed one man in Tripoli and wounded scores of protestors and Internal Security Forces (ISF) members.

The Ottoman period municipal building was stormed, looted and set ablaze following a sit-in earlier on Thursday to denounce the deployment of the armed forces to the city.

Tripoli's Mayor Riad Yamaq said: "Those who were behind the riots came from outside Tripoli."

A security source ascertained that "security forces have photos of the people who threw the hand grenades at the building and those people have certain political affiliations."

A political figure in Tripoli told Arab News: "There is an attempt to hold the army responsible or what happened, and that is a huge mistake. The protesters who were in the streets are from poor neighborhoods, have never been to school, do not have jobs and cannot be controlled, regardless of whether they were politically motivated or were spontaneous in their riots. What happened in the city cannot be seen in other cities across Lebanon because these extremely poor neighborhoods only exist in Tripoli."

The source, preferring anonymity, said that "what happened on Thursday night can be avoided in the future if strict measures are imposed by the security forces to deter and suppress protesters without violence, and riots might stop as a result of fear of prosecution."

Riots in Tripoli coincided with a \$246 million loan agreement signed between Lebanon and the World Bank to fund the country's social safety nets, to be later referred to Parliament by the government as a draft decree.

Former Prime Minister Najib Mikati, who is from Tripoli, urged the army on Friday "to control the situation in Tripoli in the next 48 hours. Otherwise, we are going somewhere extremely dangerous."

Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri described the events as "an organized crime. Every single person who plotted to jeopardize the stability of the city, burn its institutions and occupy its streets should be held responsible for these events," he said.

Hariri added that those who burned the city were “criminals who do not belong to the city.”

“Why did the army stand still on Thursday night and do nothing about the burning building? Who would protect Tripoli if the army did not?” he asked

Hariri refused, however, to entertain notions of the “old Kandahar story,” referring to allegations of extremist infiltrators in the city in the previous incidents of social unrest.

“If there was a plan to infiltrate extremism into the city, who is opening the doors for it?” he said.



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Lebanon launches online platform for vaccine registration
Violent lockdown protests wound dozens in northern Lebanon

'Secretive' Hamas elections spark internal party row

Fri, 2021-01-29 21:32

GAZA CITY: Secret Hamas internal elections have become the subject of a growing rift in the party amid calls for greater openness and representation ahead of Palestine's general elections scheduled for May.

The General Shoura Council of Hamas rejected a request by the political leadership to postpone internal elections for one year in order for the party to devote time to legislative elections, in which Hamas can maximize its political clout.

Hamas, which will celebrate its 34th anniversary this year, is looking to new leadership to lead the party over the next four years, but internal disputes are surfacing, bucking the trend of secrecy and traditionalism within the movement.

An official Hamas source said that if the Cairo-hosted inter-Palestinian dialogue on general elections proves successful, Hamas will immediately begin internal elections, provided they finish in two months instead of six.

Hamas conducts its elections in complete secrecy in three regions – the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the diaspora – once every four years in order to choose its leadership. Positions up for grabs range from leadership of sub-regions, Shoura Council spots and Political Bureau posts, which represent the highest “executive authority” in the movement.

The Political Bureau consists of 15 members, distributed evenly across Gaza, the West Bank and the diaspora. They are chosen by the Shoura, Hamas' highest regulatory authority, which maintains an anonymous member count.

The last internal elections were held in 2017 and saw Ismail Haniyeh become head of the Political Bureau – the first time a Gaza-based leader was elected to an executive position.

According to widely circulated information, Haniyeh is not guaranteed to remain in his post for a second term in light of Turkish-Qatari support for the return of former chief Khaled Mashaal, who, according to procedural rules, can become president again.

Haniyeh, who comes from a refugee family, has lived abroad for more than a year, moving between Ankara and Doha, while Mashaal, who was born in Kuwait, has resided permanently in Doha since Hamas left Syria following disputes with the Bashar Assad regime.

Last month, Hamas held elections for new leadership of the High Commanding Authority in Israeli prisons. Salama Al-Qatawi, a detainee, was appointed chief, detainee Abdel Nasser Issa his deputy, while 13 other prisoners were granted membership of the movement.

The anonymous Hamas source told Arab News that Hamas prisoners are dissatisfied with the leadership positions and their perceived lack of power in decision-making.

The source added that the prisoners are calling for prisons to be adopted as a fourth region in elections, their leader made a member of the new Political Bureau, and his deputy made a member of the Shoura Council.

If their campaign proves successful, the prisoners will have a representative in the Political Bureau for the first time in years.

Wasfi Qabha, a prominent Hamas leader in the West Bank and former minister of prisoners, defended the right of the prisoners to be represented in the Political Bureau.

He expressed dissatisfaction with prisoner and West Bank representation in the last election, adding: "It is not acceptable for the prisoners not to have a representative, and those who represent the West Bank have members residing outside it."

The West Bank is represented in the Political Bureau by exiled ex-prisoners and leaders who have settled in the region, which has led to accusations that its leadership lacks authenticity.

"The principle is that whoever leaves the West Bank is counted on the quota of abroad, and leaves the representation of the West Bank to its people. The West Bank is not a minor child in need of guardianship," Qabha told Arab News.

West Bank elections are supervised by Saleh Al-Arouri, deputy head of the Political Bureau, who has lived abroad following his deportation in 2011 that came after his release from an Israeli prison as part of the Gilad Shalit prisoner exchange.

Hamas' internal system relies on secrecy. It forbids members from directly running for any of its leadership bodies. Rather, it is based on the principle of endorsement, whereby figures are selected to compete for leadership vacancies – from the lower level to the upper.

Recently, new voices have emerged within Hamas calling for a change in the traditional pattern of elections to keep pace with developments and to face both internal and external challenges.

These include Ghazi Hamad, head of the Ministry of Social Development in Gaza, who wrote the article "Hamas elections – between traditional stereotypes and the required renewal," in which he argued that it is time to "break the tradition and adopt change, frankness, boldness and qualitative action."

Hamad addressed the Hamas base, saying that it is wrong to limit the elections of a great movement with a history, popularity and national presence to purely partisan walls.

He added that some people want elections to remain “traditional, stereotypical and secret,” denying members the ability to communicate and revise leadership, and limiting choices only to certain geographic areas.

Khalil Al-Hayya, a member of the Political Bureau, said in an interview with Hamas’ Aqsa TV that the movement took its decision to conduct internal elections as per the scheduled dates, adding that elections will be conducted “smoothly and in a friendly atmosphere.”





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Agreement between Fatah and Hamas paves way for Palestine coalition
Turkey's ties to Hamas risk hindering normalization with Israel

[A restored Palestinian library in Jerusalem preserves heritage, encourages research](#)

Author:

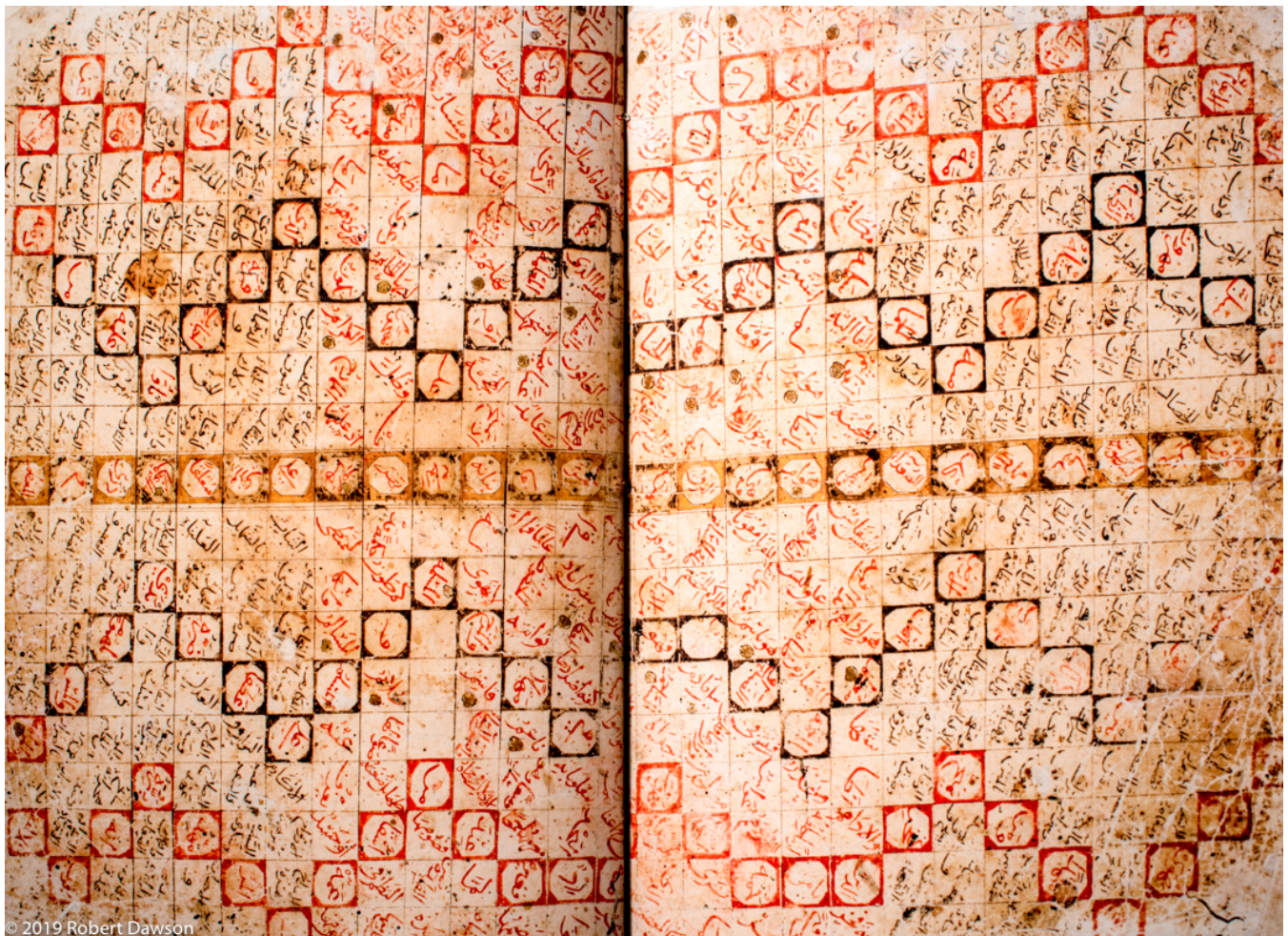
Fri, 2021-01-29 00:41

AMMAN: At the turn of the 20th century, Hajj Raghib Al-Khalidi realized he must act to preserve the rich collection of books and manuscripts his family had assembled over many generations.

In 1900, the Jerusalem-based intellectual gathered together the many volumes and papers scattered among his extended family and catalogued them in a single location. With that, the Khalidi Library was born.

Now, over a century later, Khalidi's descendants have carried out a major restoration, which has seen the library's centuries-old collection preserved and digitized for scholars to access worldwide.

The library, known in Arabic as Al-Maktaba Al-Khalidiyya, was established in the Old City of Jerusalem in Tariq Bab Al-Silsilah near the Bab Al-Silsilah, one of the main gates to Al-Haram Al-Sharif – also known as Temple Mount – home of Al-Aqsa Mosque.



An old manuscript found at Khalidi Library in Jerusalem's Old City.
(Supplied)

It contains one of the world's biggest private collections of Arabic manuscripts (approximately 1,200 titles), the oldest of which is about 1,000 years old. Among them are about 200 extremely rare Islamic texts, many of them intricately decorated with geometric motifs in colored ink.

Its printed collection, mostly of 19th century vintage, contains around 5,500 volumes. There is also a massive archive of family papers going back to the early 18th century.

The Khalidis claim to trace their ancestry to the early Muslim conqueror Khalid ibn Al-Walid, who died in 642. A family called Khalidi was documented in Jerusalem in the 11th century. The best attested family lineage, however, dates back to the 14th and 15th centuries during the Mamluk Empire.

The Mamluk-era building where the library is situated has also stood the test

of time. Built in 1389, it has outlasted successive rulers from the Umayyad Caliphate and the Ottoman Empire to the British Mandate, standing proud even today under Israeli occupation.

For Palestinians, the library is a living testament to their historic claim to the Holy City, dealing the “false Zionist narrative” a sound rebuttal, according to one of Khalidi’s descendents.

KHALIDI LIBRARY MILESTONES

- 1389 – The Mamluk-era building is constructed.
- 1900 – Raghib Al-Khalidi establishes library.
- 1967 – East Jerusalem is annexed by Israel.
- 1989 – Friends of the Khalidi Library is incorporated.

“A library of rare books and manuscripts that goes back to the 10th and 11th century is proof that Jerusalemites and Palestinians have been a center of culture and civilization for millennia,” Rashid Khalidi, a Palestinian-American historian of the Middle East and Edward Said Professor of Modern Arab Studies at Columbia University, told Arab News.

“(Zionists) argue we don’t exist and that we have a fabricated history and that other people are indigenous to this land and we are not. We the Palestinians are the people of this land while the other narrative is that of the settler-colonial project that was imposed on us.”

At the close of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, Jerusalem was left divided between Jordan and the fledgling state of Israel. The Arab defeat sparked a massive flight of Palestinians to Arab countries of the Levant region that is known as Al-Nakba – literally “the catastrophe.”

At the conclusion of the 1967 war, matters became even worse for the Palestinians when Israeli forces overcame the Jordanian army’s resistance and captured East Jerusalem. The resulting shift in the balance of power drove out much of the remaining Arab population. In 1980 Israel annexed Jerusalem in a move not recognized internationally.

More recently, in a controversial decision in 2018, Donald Trump’s administration moved the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, officially recognizing the city as Israel’s capital. Palestinians have long sought East Jerusalem as the capital of a future state.



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No matter which party is in power in Washington, Israeli settlements keep expanding into occupied Palestinian territories in the West Bank, dimming hopes of a peaceful resolution to the decades-old conflict and the creation of a Palestinian state. But the descendants of those displaced families, scattered across the Middle East and in the far-flung corners of diaspora, have not stopped lobbying for the right of return.

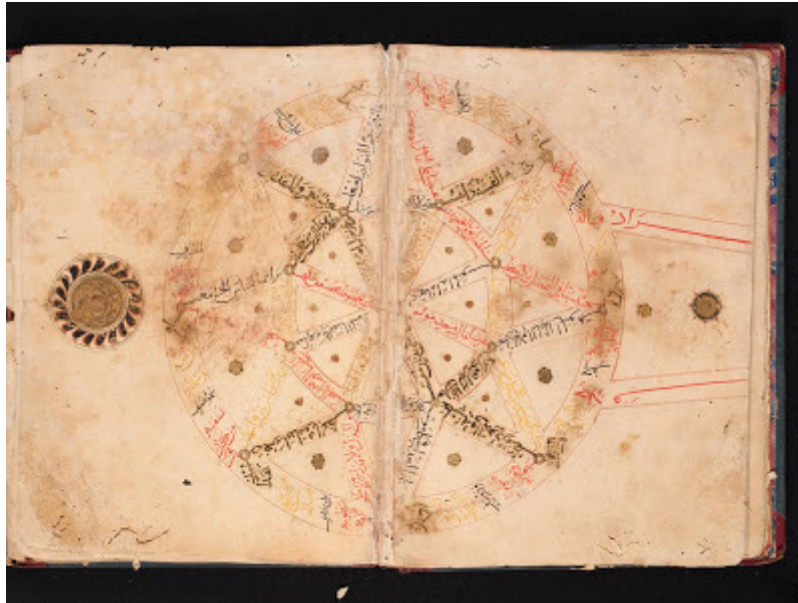
“After the 1967 occupation, there were serious concerns we would lose the library even though it is registered as a protected family endowment,” Raja Khalidi, another descendant of the library’s founder, told Arab News.

Raja is the director-general of the Ramallah-based Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS), who previously served as a senior economist with the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

He spent most of his life in the diaspora, but returned to Palestine in recent years to join the family’s efforts to protect and preserve the library which bears their name.

“Different members of our family rebuffed Israeli attempts to confiscate the library and in the end parts of the roof were confiscated to allow for the

creation of Jewish yeshiva (religious schools),” he said.



An old manuscript found at Khalidi Library in Jerusalem's Old City.
(Supplied)

In 1989, the Friends of the Khalidi Library (FKL) was incorporated in the US under the chairmanship of Walid Khalidi to rally support and solicit funds to protect the site.

Donations quickly flooded in from members of the extended family, the Ford Foundation, UNESCO, the Dutch government and the Arab Economic and Social Fund in Kuwait, among many other sources.

With these funds, according to the Khalidis, the Boston-based FKL was not only able to stave off Israeli encroachments but also completely renovate, refurbish and re-equip the library and preserve its valuable holdings.

Raja and his fellow court-appointed administrators, Asem and Khalil, worked hard to save the old manuscripts with the help of foreign experts, who trained local staff to continue the preservation work.

Every document, book and manuscript has finally been scanned and catalogued. “It took us years to do that but we are excited that all the original manuscripts are now saved and protected and their content is scanned for all researchers to use online,” Raja said.



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Inside the Khalidi Library in Jerusalem's Old City. (Supplied)

Several of the texts held by the library shed light on the history of Palestinians in Jerusalem, explore the Arab presence in the region, and tell the story of the Khalidi family and its connections to the city.

The goal of the library is not only to preserve heritage but to also encourage research, according to Raja. "We want to be known not only as a repository but also a regenerator of original publications," he said.

To this end, the library, in addition to preserving old manuscripts, has branched out into publishing, recently printing a work by Rouhi Khalidi, who died in 1913, titled "Zionism, or the Zionist Question" – quite possibly the first book on the subject penned by a Palestinian.

Rashid feels it is wrong to deny Israelis their national identity. "Just like in America, we recognize the American people even though they created a country by the expulsion of the indigenous people and created their own settler-colonial reality," he said.

Even though many Israeli researchers "are blinded by their chauvinism and racism and who disbelieve that we have a legitimate national history," Rashid believes the Khalid Library could serve as a useful resource for the many Israeli researchers who acknowledge the Palestinian narrative.

Twitter: @daoudkuttab





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Millenia-old gold coins from the Islamic period discovered in Jerusalem
Grand Mosque library uses ozone tech to preserve manuscripts

[Former MEPs slam Iran's terror campaign across Europe](#)

Author:

Fri, 2021-01-29 01:06

LONDON: A group of former Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) have slammed Iran for its campaign of terror across Europe. A cross-party panel of former European policymakers and experts on Tehran's use of terrorism criticized the regime for using intelligence assets as terrorists.

The panel, hosted by the International Committee in Search of Justice (ISJ),

gathered amid a diplomatic crisis between Iran and the EU, with an Iranian diplomat currently on trial for planning to bomb an anti-Tehran rally in Paris.

Assadollah Assadi – a senior Iranian diplomat at the embassy in Vienna, Austria – and his three co-conspirators are charged with plotting a terror attack on an annual gathering of the Iranian opposition in 2018.

The “Free Iran” gathering was launched to show support for the Iranian opposition leader Maryam Rajavi’s proposed roadmap for the future of Iran, which calls for the universal right to vote, free elections, and a market economy.

A court in Belgium is expected to offer its ruling on the case of Assadi and his conspirators on Feb. 4.

The ISJ panel included Alejo Vidal-Quadras, former vice president of the European Parliament, Giulio Terzi, former Italian foreign minister, Struan Stevenson, former Scotland MEP, and Paulo Casaca, a former Portuguese MEP.

Vidal-Quadras said: “I would advise policymakers that if you want peace and stability in the region, if you want human rights to be respected in Iran, do not engage with this regime.”

On the foiled plot to bomb the rally in 2018, Vidal-Quadras said: “Fortunately, this plot was disrupted through the cooperation of European governments. The latest revelations from the trial show that the Iranian-Belgian couple Nasimeh Naami and Amir Saadouni, who received the bomb directly from Assadi, were instructed to place the explosive device as close as possible to Rajavi.”

He added: “I was sitting very close to Rajavi. First-rank political figures were sitting in a space of a few meters around her. You can imagine the consequences if such an attack succeeded.”

Terzi told the audience: “There are many questions about this case and European policy. How is Europe going to stop these terrorist activities? If we look at history, there have been a lot of terrorist actions on European soil that the regime has denied despite a huge amount of evidence that pointed to Iran. How will Europe stop these terrorist attacks against Europeans and political refugees?”

Asked by Arab News how the EU could combat Iran’s reign of terror across the continent, Stevenson said: “The only policy that works is toughness and decisiveness.”

He added: “To stop Tehran’s terrorism, the EU must list the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps, the Quds Force and the intelligence services as terrorist outfits.

“Secondly, the EU must investigate who Assadi met in Europe, and whom he paid. Identify and arrest these agents and expel them.”

His final suggestion was for the EU to “shut down Iran’s embassies until we have absolute assurance that the regime will dismantle their terror network in Europe.”

Casaca said: “European institutions should reinforce European unity, uphold the rule of law, and ensure the protection of values that keep our countries together, including freedom and protection from terrorism.

“They must not bow to foreign terrorist powers that want us to bow before them. The regime must not enjoy impunity in causing terrorism.”



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