



# IRAN

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## Iran, Georgia cultural ties

Top cultural officials from Iran and Georgia met in Tbilisi to discuss ways to strengthen cooperation between the two nations in science and culture. During the meeting, Iran's Ambassador to Georgia, Mahmoud Adib, and Iranian Cultural Attaché Ahmad-Ali Mehri-Ardestani, held talks with the President of Georgia's Caucasus University, Kakha Shengelia.

# 'World War III' portrays destructive power of humanity's worst impulses



By Hamideh Hosseini

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EXCLUSIVE

Houman Seyedi's sixth feature film, 'World War III,' is a meticulously crafted cinematic masterpiece, presenting a series of rhythmic events that offer a captivating glimpse into its intricately woven plot. The film's plot twists and turns, each one convolutedly designed to propel the protagonist towards a profound transformation, leaves the viewers mesmerized by its intricate tapestry of events.

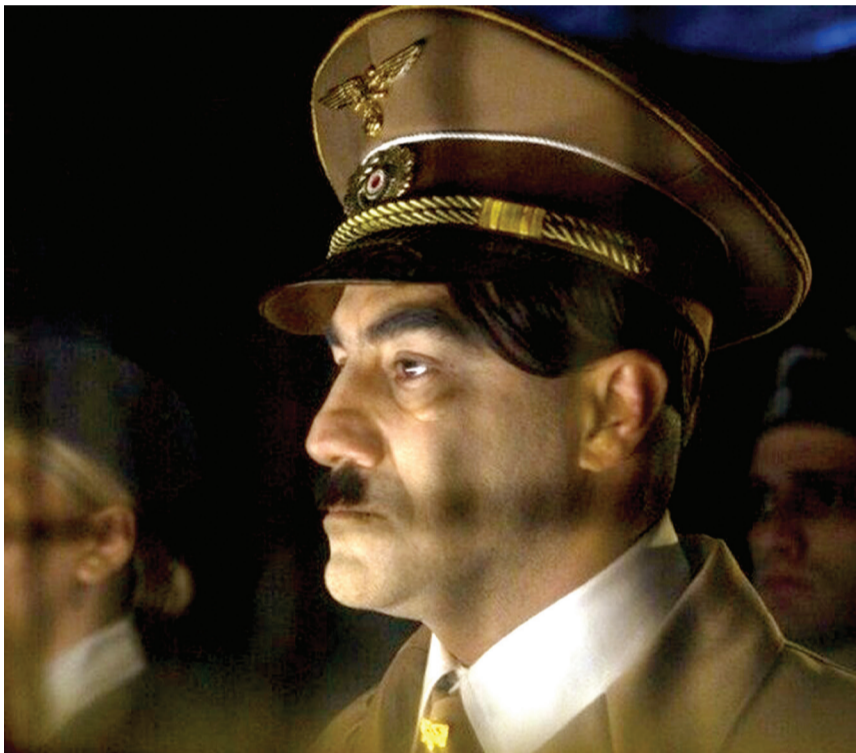
### Domestic, global success

Seyedi's oeuvre has consistently garnered widespread recognition within the Iranian film industry, repeatedly topping the charts at the Iranian box office following its domestic release as of April 15. Furthermore, the film's premiere at the prestigious Venice Film Festival was met with overwhelming critical acclaim, securing top honors in both the Best Film and Best Actor categories of the Horizons competition.

This resounding success paved the way for numerous international screenings and further accolades for the film, cementing its status as a true cinematic masterpiece. However, it is worth noting that despite its critical and commercial success both at home and abroad, 'World War III' is not a film that leaves audiences with a sense of comfort, instead opting to explore complex themes that may prove challenging and annoying for some viewers.

### Psychological collage

Delving into the cinematic background of the helmer sheds light on development of Seyedi's directorial vision in his aptitude for creating a psychological collage. His fifth feature film 'Sheeple,' bears certain similarities to his latest work, 'World War III,' as both films trace the gradual decline of a protagonist into despotic tendencies, instigated by a series of harrowing experiences of oppression. The film is the story of a homeless day laborer, Shakib, who lost his wife and son in an earthquake years ago and is now working as a construction worker



on a film about the atrocities committed by Hitler during World War II.

### "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes"

The film begins with a profound epigraph attributed to the legendary American author and humorist Mark Twain: "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes." From the very start, the film masterfully adheres to this quotation, seamlessly weaving together a series of interconnected events that build upon each other with each passing minute, ultimately culminating in a powerful and thought-provoking message that resonates long after the film has concluded. The script's careful attention to detail and intricate rhyming patterns elevates the film's thematic content and enhances its overall impact on audiences.

At the outset of the film, Shakib is portrayed as a hangdog and downtrodden character, but as the narrative progresses, his metamorphosis into a vengeful monster becomes increasingly apparent. This latent monster within him is aroused by the negative influences of the individuals who surround him and is exacerbated as the story hurtles towards its climactic final moments.

The expression on Shakib's countenance during the scene where he is first instructed to play the role of Hitler and deliver a resounding slap to one of his fellow actors is undeniably humorous and indicative of his initial unsuitability

for such a role. Nevertheless, his profound and compelling transformation into the despotic persona of Hitler, during the final half hour of the film, is a feat of dramatic storytelling that is both fully justified and psychologically credible.

Shakib's persona is portrayed as one of frailty and diffidence, as evidenced by his clothing and gait.



Moreover, his speech pattern, which is subdued and disjointed, reinforces this characterization. It appears that he is apprehensive about public speaking, further compounding his sense of vulnerability. This proclivity towards reticence may provide insight into his attraction to Ladan, whose muteness obviates the need for verbal communication. While it is undeniable that the film showcases the director's recently-honed ability to create a complex psychological tableau, I am of the idea that it is Tanabandeh's spellbinding performance that truly brings the director's vision to fruition. Tanabandeh's commanding portrayal of the protagonist not only

garnered him well-deserved accolades at the Venice Film Festival but also imbued the film with a heightened sense of psychological depth and nuance, elevating Seyedi's efforts to craft a truly unforgettable work of psychological cinema.

### Skillful cinematography

Throughout the film, Seyedi employs a range of cinematic techniques to great effect, creating a sense of unease and disorientation that perfectly captures the chaotic nature of the world he has created. The use of fragmented narrative structure, non-linear storytelling, and jump cuts all serve to reinforce the film's thematic concerns, while also heightening the sense of tension and suspense.

In this regard, the cinematographic expertise of Peyman Shadmanfar is evident throughout the film, as he deftly captures intimate moments of his characters at their most vulnerable and in dire need of recognition. Particularly noteworthy are the opening sequences, where Shadmanfar employs a shaky camera technique to convey the tremendous physical exertion undertaken by the characters as they valiantly attempt to complete tasks amidst a deluge of rain. These expertly-framed scenes leave a deep and lasting impression on the viewer, underscoring the importance of skillful cinematography in conveying a film's underlying themes and emotions.

In addition, the framing of the final scenes of the film easily demonstrates the power within Shakib's character, from the scene of torturing prisoners to the one where he watches the film crew's chefs prepare food with a specific purpose in mind. Even in the final scene, Shakib calmly sits at the head of the table and watches as his victims are poisoned to be killed.

A striking, not necessarily negative, aspect that captivates the attention of the viewers was the conspicuous lack of extensive character development throughout the film unless for Shakib. It wasn't until the final 20 minutes that we were afforded a glimpse into the psyche of the director himself (Mr. Rastegar), an introspective individual who brazenly shames Shakib. Additionally, we witness a poignant display of Neda's compassionate and humanitarian nature, a trait that was previously unprecedented in light of the minimal character introductions provided earlier in the film.

### Are oppressor and oppressed intrinsic identities?

Seyedi appears to be grappling with a fundamental question: are the roles of oppressor and oppressed inherent aspects of one's identity or are they simply transient roles that individuals adopt when presented with the appropriate opportunity or circumstance? Through his masterful storytelling and incisive characterizations, Seyedi forces the viewer to confront this thought-provoking inquiry.

The final scene of the film evokes comparisons to several iconic works of art throughout history, such as Leonardo da Vinci's 'Last Supper' or even the harrowing final moments of Hitler's life, where he partook in a serene final meal with his remaining staff before ultimately committing suicide alongside his wife on a couch in his private sitting room later that same day.

This haunting and thought-provoking conclusion leaves a lasting impression on the viewer, underscoring the film's deeply resonant themes of power, oppression, and the complex psychological underpinnings that motivate individuals towards acts of violence and tyranny.

## Fandoqlou forest in Iran: A haven for biodiversity under smugglers' threat

### Social Desk

Fandoqlou forest in northwestern Iran is a magnificent natural reserve, stretching over 16,000 hectares of land, with more than four thousand hectares covered in lush green forests, replete with bountiful hazelnut trees. The forest is an extension of the Hyrcanian forests in Iran, home to various distinctive flora and fauna, including the rare Iranian red deer. Sadly, this natural habitat is under threat from smugglers who are cutting down trees to make charcoal. The illegal logging activities have put the forest's biodiversity in danger, and the government's efforts to combat this criminal activity have been insufficient.

Province is saddled with limited number of rangers and safeguarding this forested expanse has been fraught with many challenges. Consequently, this forest has been pillaged by tree smugglers for several years.

### Legal harvesting of trees

Qolizadeh disclosed that the forest trees in the protected area of Fandoqlou cannot be legally harvested for industrial purposes and are typically utilized as firewood or charcoal. The presence of wood industry factories in the locality has provided a pretext for felling trees, and locals have become accomplices in this unlawful activity. Judicial oversight, coupled with round-the-clock vigilance by park rangers in the region and even outside



### Smugglers' tactic

According to Mahmoud Qolizadeh, the director general of Natural Resources in Ardabil Province, smugglers are using state-of-the-art chainsaws to stealthily cut down the trees. In some instances, the smugglers even resort to igniting fires to eliminate the surviving remnants of the Hyrcanian wildlife on the border of Ardabil and Gilan provinces to peddle their charcoal in the market. Smugglers enter the forest with their kin and cut one or two trees, taking a break for tea before transporting the illicit timber to the open market for a profitable sale.

### Challenges faced by rangers

Accessing Fandoqlou has encountered numerous impediments due to its rugged terrain, rendering the task of monitoring and safeguarding the area a demanding undertaking. Forest rangers must traverse Heyran Pass, a tough mountainous road, to reach operational zones sometimes amidst blazing fires. Furthermore, Ardabil

the wood industry factories, has curtailed wood smuggling to a certain extent. Furthermore, the authorities have intensified forest protection measures and created obstructions to impede illicit transit. In addition, monitoring has been amplified through the employment of cutting-edge technological cameras.

### Arson as a tactic

Colonel Mohammad Nouri, the commander of the Natural Resources Protection Unit of Ardabil Province, confirmed the insidious practice of wood smuggling in the Fandoqlou forest and expounded that for years, smugglers have deployed arson as a tactic to divert forest rangers. They set fire to one section of the forest, thereby attracting rangers' attention, while they engage in clandestine tree cutting in another part. The fact that a section of the Fandoqlou forest burned in November, despite the absence of any fire history in the area, is an unequivocal indication of the malice behind this nefarious activity perpetrated by the smugglers.