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### Future of Iran-Syria ties; opportunities, challenges ahead

By Navid Kamali  
Foreign affairs expert

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The sudden collapse of Syria's political system after more than five decades of the Assad family's rule marks a turning point in contemporary Middle East history.

The development, which occurred unexpectedly in less than two weeks, has fundamentally altered regional equations and presented a new perspective for regional and international actors. What happened in Damascus not only marked the end of a long-standing regime but also initiated a period of uncertainty and new challenges in the region that could profoundly impact the Middle East's future.

While these developments are particularly difficult for us Iranians, who have witnessed years of sacrifice by Defenders of the Sayyida Zaynab Shrine in clearing Syrian territory from takfiri and terrorist groups, we must approach these changes based on national interests and resistance considerations. We must acknowledge the new reality governing Syria to prevent the severance of ties between the Iranian and Syrian nations and protect assets such as thousands of Iranian residents in Syria. [Page 8 >](#)



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## Iran Spends Over \$10b Annually to Meet Afghan Migrants' Needs: UN Envoy

### World to blame for failing to support Tehran

"The irresponsible withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan in August 2021 has led to widespread migration from Afghanistan, placing significant pressure on Iran, which was already under unilateral and illegal sanctions," says Amir Saeid Iravani. 7 >

## Tehran, Ankara ink cooperation pact with \$30b trade target

Iran and Turkey signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to enhance bilateral trade, with both countries setting a target of \$30 billion in trade within the next five years.

The agreement was signed in the presence of Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadeq-Malvajerd and Turkey's Minister of Trade Ömer Bolat during the 29th Joint Economic Cooperation Commission meeting held in Tehran on Wednesday.

According to Amineh Tarfa'a, head of the International Affairs Center at Iran's Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, the three-day event concluded with the signing of a comprehensive MoU that covers various sectors, including trade, transport, customs, transit, investment, banking, electricity, agriculture, culture, tourism, and cooperation.

The agreement will strengthen existing ties, particularly in the transport sector, where the two countries have maintained robust relations, especially in road transportation, Tarfa'a said.

Currently, trade between the two nations stands at \$11.7 billion, with plans to increase this figure to \$30 billion over the next five years, the official said, adding that the strategic plan to achieve this ambitious goal has already been laid out. Iran and Turkey are working to reach a target of \$30 billion in bilateral trade, Bolat said on Wednesday.

His remarks followed a meeting with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian during his visit to Tehran for the 29th Turkish-Iranian Economic Cooperation Commission.

Bolat, for his part, pointed to plans to modernize border crossings and establish two additional crossings to streamline customs operations and boost trade.

He also stressed the importance of revitalizing a preferential trade agreement from 2015 and concluding a comprehensive tourism pact between the two nations. Iranian President Pezeshkian stressed the importance of strengthening relations between the Islamic countries, emphasizing the benefits of increased cooperation in trade, transportation and resource sharing. Bolat said relations between Turkey and Iran have been strengthened in economy and trade within the framework of the High-Level Cooperation Council, which is chaired by the presidents of both countries. He explained the initiatives discussed during the commission meeting, including cooperation in such areas as trade, energy, health, agriculture and urbanization.

## Public urged to join Pezeshkian-proposed energy-saving campaign amid shortages



Top Iranian officials in unison on Friday placed a premium on the importance of public participation in optimizing energy consumption and called for nationwide involvement in the "2 Degrees Less" campaign.

Following the invitation by President Massoud Pezeshkian and Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad, various officials issued statements urging citizens to join the initiative aimed at reducing energy consumption and ensuring adequate winter fuel supplies, Shana reported.

The Iranian president on Thursday evening called on the public to conserve gas, emphasizing that collective efforts are needed to ensure the uninterrupted supply of fuel across the country.

In a video message, Pezeshkian emphasized the health risks posed by air pollution and said improving fuel quality requires better control over heating in homes and workplaces.

"We urge everyone to join by lowering their household temperatures by at least two de-

grees Celsius to contribute to gas conservation and prevent disruptions in fuel distribution nationwide," he said.

On Thursday morning, during a visit to an industrial and mining capabilities exhibition, the president criticized inefficient energy consumption in industries, offices, and homes.

He stressed that the government, producers, and citizens must work together to revise policies and adopt more efficient energy consumption patterns.

As an example, he noted, despite the current shortage of electricity and gas, the exhibition venue is so warm that we have to remove our jackets.

Pezeshkian pointed out that electricity and gas consumption in Iran is currently three times the global average. "This is while we lack sufficient gas and electricity to meet industrial needs," he said.

Pezeshkian added that inefficient energy use in industries, offices, and households must be addressed.

"A cultural shift is necessary to prioritize efficiency and effectiveness in energy usage across all sectors," the president stated. Meanwhile, the oil minister underlined the importance of public participation in the "2 Degrees Less" campaign, saying he believes the current challenges can be addressed with public cooperation and without significant disruptions.

Speaking on Friday, Mohsen Paknejad noted that seasonal trends in fuel consumption often lead to changes in fuel management for residential, commercial, and smaller industrial sectors.

"Due to the increase in household consumption during the colder months, we are naturally required to impose managed limitations on other sectors to ensure electricity and gas supply for all citizens," he explained.

Referring to a meeting held earlier in the day with Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni and Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadeq-Malvajerd, Paknejad said the session aimed to establish effec-

tive measures for optimizing the country's fuel management.

Paknejad highlighted the potential impact of the campaign, noting that public cooperation could significantly reduce the already minimal risk of gas outages in certain regions.

"With the support of the people, I believe we can navigate these challenging days without major concerns," he stated.

Also, government spokesperson Fatemeh Mohajerani highlighted that reducing heating levels by just two degrees Celsius in workplaces and homes could significantly impact energy management.

"Our country's greatest achievements have been made possible through public collaboration," she said. "This winter, alongside the joy of snow and rain, we can ensure energy reserves for the coming days."

Shina Ansari, the head of the Department of the Environment also endorsed the campaign on social media, writing, "The message of the '2 Degrees Less' campaign is clear: with collective effort and a small reduction in heating systems, we can achieve stable gas supplies, reduce air pollution, and prevent power outages."

## Energy minister says Iran-Qatar trade to hit \$1b per annum



Iranian Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi said that trade exchanges between Iran and Qatar currently stands at approximately \$200 million, which are planned to increase to \$1 billion per year in the near future.

Aliabadi made the remarks in Doha during the closing ceremony of the 10th Joint Commission on Economic, Social, Cultural and Trade Cooperation between Iran and Qatar on Thursday, which was also attended by Qatari Minister of Commerce and Industry Sheikh Faisal bin Thani bin

Faisal Al Thani, IRNA wrote.

The Iranian minister expressed confidence that the latest meeting by the joint commission will strengthen bilateral ties in economic, trade, energy, transportation, and other areas of mutual interest between the two states.

Aliabadi announced his country's readiness to welcome Qatari traders and economic players for investment in various Iranian sectors, saying "I hope that, similar to the outlook for increasing financial exchanges, we will witness an annual in-

vestment of at least one billion dollars in Iran by Qatari parties in the near future."

He stressed the need for the implementation of agreements and policies of the leaders of the two nations to boost cooperation in the region and in all fields from energy, transportation, and tourism to culture, health and banking. The Iranian minister also spoke about a joint project to connect power grids of Iran and Qatar via a 200-kilometer underwater cable, saying that the study plan of the project began in March 2023 and is currently in its final stages. This project will bring about big changes in power transfer between the two countries during peak consumption periods, and will also pave the way for the transit of electricity to third countries in other times, he added.

## Expediency Council to review FATF case if submitted: Larijani

Iran's Expediency Council will consider the country's potential membership in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) if the matter is brought before it, said its head, Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani.

In a meeting with university students and representatives from student organizations on Wednesday, Larijani emphasized that the issue of joining FATF is a technical one. "If it comes to the Expediency Council, we will review it," he stated, IRNA reported.

Larijani also raised concerns about the practical benefits of joining the international financial watchdog, particularly in the context of ongoing US sanctions that have posed significant challenges for Iranian traders, especially in foreign exchange transactions. "Will the United States lift its restrictions if we accept FATF?" he questioned.

Earlier, Larijani had discussed the issue with



Iranian economic activists, asking how effective they thought joining FATF would be in alleviating the country's financial challenges. One participant suggested that it could provide a 40% improvement, but Larijani pointed out that it is essential to clearly understand the tangible benefits before moving forward.

During his presidential campaign, President Masoud Pezeshkian had said that his administration would seek more engagement with the world, pledging to do every effort to ensure the lifting of sanctions on the

Iranian economy.

Iran has been under tough economic pressure after May 2018 when US former president Donald Trump withdrew from a landmark 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran – known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – re-imposing sanctions on the country.

In his first press conference after taking office in mid-September, Pezeshkian pledged his government's commitment to resolve disputes surrounding the FATF and the JCPOA to improve Iran's foreign relations and achieve long-term goals.

Many travelers journeying to Iran are eager to explore the attractions of Kashan, a city in Isfahan Province, known for its beautiful sites and rich traditional arts. Situated on the main highway from Tehran to Isfahan, Kashan offers intriguing places to visit, prompting many visitors to stop for a few hours or even overnight to learn more about the city. With its array of handicrafts, ancient sites, and monuments, Kashan showcases some of Iran's finest highlights.

Kashan is rapidly developing into a major urban center in Isfahan Province. Located at an altitude of approximately 940 meters above sea level, the city experiences a dry climate characterized by extremely hot summers and very cold winters, largely due to its proximity to the Dasht-e-Kavir, the northern desert of Iran.

# Kashan; a gateway to Iran's rich traditions



Karkas Mountains

## Karkas Mountain

The Karkas Mountain, also known as the Karkas Mountain, form a natural boundary to the west of the city. This mountain range stretches from northwest to southeast and reaches altitudes of up to 4,000 meters. The Karkas Mountains divide Kashan into two distinct topographic and climatic areas: the temperate western highlands and the arid eastern lowlands.



Ameri House

## Architects and artists

For many travelers to Iran, history is a significant draw. The Sialk Mounds, located within modern-day Kashan, have been inhabited for over 8,000 years, with archaeological findings revealing a rich variety of artifacts produced, bought, and sold there. Like many other Iranian cities, Kashan was once home to Zoroastrians before the Arab invasion in the 7th century. The city eventually surrendered and converted to Islam, becoming a highly religious center alongside Qom and Sabzevar.

In the 11th century, the Khwarazmians built a fortress and a wall called Jalali to protect the inhabitants. The Safavid kings took a particular interest in the area, with the Fin Garden created as a Persian Garden for Shah Abbas during his visits to Kashan. The Qajars continued this legacy, especially under Fat'hali Shah, who added several sections to the garden.

Kashan prospered significantly during the rise of foreign trade between Iranian and Russian merchants. The old houses of Kashan, which exemplify traditional Iranian architecture,

reflect the affluent living conditions of that era and showcase the architectural styles of average Iranians.

## Attractions

**Abbasi House:** The Abbasi House, also known as the Abbassian House, is a stunning example of traditional Persian architecture located in Kashan. Built in the late 18th century by a wealthy glass merchant, this his-

toric house museum is renowned for its intricate architectural features and decorations. The house comprises several courtyards, multistory buildings, and beautifully adorned rooms with plaster reliefs, mirror-work, and stained glass. The central courtyard features gardens, pools filled with Qanat water, and symmetrical designs that create a serene environment. Today, part of the Abbasi House has been converted into a teahouse, traditional restaurant, and small shop, offering visitors a chance to experience Kashan's rich cultural

heritage.

**Ameri House:** The Ameri House, also known as Saray-e Ameriha, is one of Kashan's largest and most impressive historical houses. Constructed during the Zand dynasty for Aqa Ameri, the governor of Kashan, this grand residence spans approximately 9,000 square meters and includes 85 rooms, seven courtyards, and two bathhouses. The house is celebrated for its remarkable architecture, featuring brick construction with mud and straw insulation and beautifully decorated interiors with gypsum and mirror works. The Ameri House boasts the tallest wind catcher (*badgir*) in Kashan, adding to its unique charm. It has been restored and transformed into a traditional-style hotel, allowing visitors to immerse themselves in Kashan's cultural heritage.

**Fin Garden:** Fin Garden is one of the nine Persian gardens inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage Sites list. This beautiful garden is historically significant as the site where Amir Kabir, a popular Iranian politician of the 19th century, was ordered to be murdered by the king. The garden's cool and shady areas provide a pleasant ambiance in the region's dry and hot climate.

**National Museum of Kashan:** Established in 1965, the National Museum of Kashan is located on the western side of Fin Garden. The museum showcases over 400 pieces of artifacts from the 7th millennium BCE to the contemporary era.

**Sialk Hills:** Once located outside the city, the Sialk Hills are now enveloped by Kashan's urban development. These mounds represent some of the earliest

settlements in this part of Iran following the Ice Age.



Amin-o Dowleh Caravanserai

**Aqa Bozorg Mosque:** This late 18th-century mosque and theological school (*madrasah*) is situated in the city center. It features unique architecture with two courtyards at different levels and a relatively open domed chamber.

**Kashan Bazaar:** Some believe that this bazaar was first built during the Seljuks and renovated under the Safavids. Within the bazaar, visitors can find several mosques, tombs, *timchehs* (marketplace), and bathhouses.

**Soltan Amir Ahmad Bathhouse:** This traditional bathhouse is believed to date back to the Seljuk era (11th-12th centuries). Its beautiful design and decoration attract many visitors eager to explore the ancient lifestyle of the local people.

**Amin-o Dowleh Caravanserai:** The Amin-o Dowleh Caravanserai, also known as Timcheh-ye Amin-o-Dowleh, is situated in the heart of the ancient bazaar

of Kashan. This expansive caravansary features three floors

and served as a vital hub for the purchase and sale of valuable goods. The ceiling of this historic monument is adorned with intricate designs, creating a spacious and inviting atmosphere.

**Jaame Mosque of Kashan:** The

features a sunken courtyard and two levels. Adel House is regarded as one of the masterpieces of Kashan's architectural heritage, showcasing luxurious decorations and intricate embellishments. Its original design harmonizes perfectly with the local culture and climate of Kashan.

**Manouchehri House:** The Manouchehri House, now functioning as a hotel, dates back approximately 400 years. Situated in the historic district of Kashan, between the Sarpoleh and Sarasang neighborhoods, this house stands out as a unique example of traditional Iranian architecture.

**Yasin House:** Located in the Darband Aqa neighborhood, Yasin House was constructed in the mid-19th century. Built under the order of Fat'hali Shah Qajar for Seyyed Mohammad Taqi Hosseini, a prominent scholar of the 18th century, this house showcases the elegance of its time.



Tabatabai House

Jaame Mosque of Kashan is the city's oldest monument, dating back to the Seljuk era. Throughout its history, the mosque has endured significant destruction, followed by periods of repair and reconstruction, each bringing about notable changes to its structure. Several historical inscriptions can be found within the mosque, providing insight into its rich heritage.

**Adel House:** Known as the "Pearl of Kashan", Adel House is a stunning traditional hotel that dates back to the Qajar period. Constructed from sun-dried bricks, this beautiful house

**Tabatabai House:** One of the most beautiful and spectacular monuments in Kashan, the Tabatabai Traditional House lies in the Sultan Amir Ahmad neighborhood, an ancient district of the city. This house is a masterpiece of historical architectural art.

Constructed in 1835 at the command of Seyyed Jafar Tabatabai, a renowned carpet merchant of the era, it spans an area of 4,700 square meters and comprises 40 rooms, four courtyards, four basements, and three windcatchers, strategically located along two qanat routes.



Aqa Bozorg Mosque

# Europe's economy needs help

By David Mchugh & Lorne Cook  
Journalists

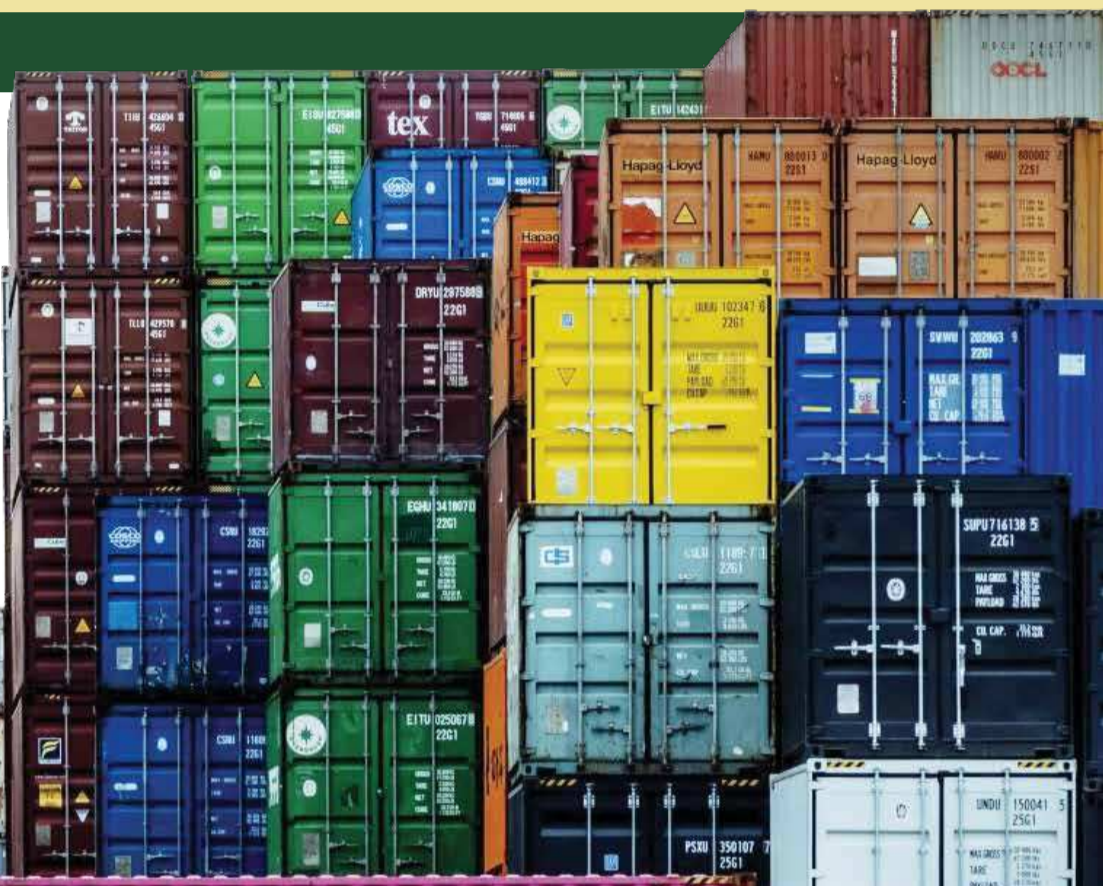
## OPINION

Where once there was the so-called French-German axis to push Europe ahead, now there's a vacuum. French Prime Minister Michel Barnier resigned Thursday after losing a vote of confidence, and while President Emmanuel Macron will appoint a successor, the new head of government will lack a majority. Elections are not constitutionally permitted until at least June.

Germany's coalition led by Social Democratic Chancellor Olaf Scholz with the Greens and pro-business Free Democrats fractured in November, triggering an early election on February 23. Talks to form a new government could last into April.

Even before the French and German governments collapsed, Europe's economy had enough difficulties. Tepid growth and lagging competitiveness versus the US and China. An auto industry that's struggling. Where to find billions for defense against Russia? And now Donald Trump is threatening tariffs.

Solutions will be harder to find while the two countries that make up almost half of the eurozone economy remain stuck in political paralysis well into 2025.



The European Central Bank is pictured next to containers in Frankfurt, Germany, on April 9, 2024.  
MICHAEL PROBST/AP

At least Germany's likely new chancellor, conservative opposition leader Friedrich Merz, appears open to loosening constitutional restrictions on borrowing to enable pro-growth spending and investment, said Mujtaba Rahman, managing director for Europe at Eurasia Group.

France, however, could be facing "complete paralysis on the economic question," Rahman said. "It's highly unlikely they're going to get a political equilibrium that has a mandate to implement a credible fiscal course correction."

"And that's obviously a problem for Europe because it means the great potential of the European economy is not what it otherwise should be, because you don't have France and Germany firing on all cylinders," he said. Then there's Europe's lagging business environment, dissected by former European Central Bank head Mario Draghi in a report that contains recommendations such as common borrowing to support public investment; EU-wide industrial policy; and integrating financial markets to help startups raise capital. Yet "nothing can move in Europe without Franco-German alignment," Rahman said.

Meanwhile, Europe's auto industry has sought a review of tough EU emissions standards in 2025 instead of 2026, saying slackening demand for electric cars means they won't be able to avoid heavy fines and that the money would be better used to develop new electric vehicles. Anne-Laure Delatte, a French economist and head of research at the National Center for Sci-

entific Research, said financial markets remain cautious but are not overly alarmed by France's political instability. But economic weakness in France and Germany could have broader implications for the European Union. "This could either weaken Europe's position globally or shift power and influence to other European countries like the Netherlands or Spain, which are performing well at the moment," she said.

France is expected to see growth of 1.1% this year and 0.8% next year, while Germany's economy is expected to shrink 0.1% this year, the second consecutive year of contraction, and rebound modestly with 0.7% next year. Germany faces headwinds from a shortage of skilled labor, excessive bureaucracy, and higher energy prices, and efforts to address those issues have been

stalled by squabbling in Scholz's coalition.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, head of the EU's executive arm, is equipped with serious powers, especially on trade, a key EU authority delegated to Brussels by member countries. But there's only so much von der Leyen can do without political backing from the two biggest member countries, whose national budgets are bigger than the EU's.

The most urgent matter may be how to respond to US President-elect Donald Trump, who takes office on January 20. European officials are trying to defuse a potential trade conflict involving new US tariffs or import taxes on European goods that would seriously ding the continent's export-focused economy. Europe could decide not to retaliate to any US tariffs, thus avoid-

ing a mutually destructive tit-for-tat cycle. The bloc could also commit to buying US liquefied natural gas to mollify Trump, or spend billions more on defense for Ukraine to answer his complaint that European countries don't meet NATO commitments on defense spending.

Europe is seeing only modest growth as consumers pummeled by inflation remain cautious about spending. The economy is expected to expand 0.8% this year and 1.3% next year for the 20 EU member countries that use the euro currency, according to the European Commission.

While the direct impact on growth is small, the political logjam means Europe is missing an important opportunity to engage Trump, said Holger Schmieding, chief economist at Berenberg Bank.

"It would be ideal if Europe — at

the moment when Trump is not yet in office — would prepare a big offer for Trump, such as: We spend significantly more on defense if on trade and on Ukraine you don't disappoint us. This is unfortunately not happening." "The risk is that Trump on trade might be tougher on us than otherwise because Germany and France are missing in action," he said.

Von der Leyen can offer to get countries to purchase more US natural gas and remind Trump that the EU could retaliate, but "the offer that Europe can make to Trump is small, rather than a big offer where there would be German and French money behind it."

The EU Commission estimates that as much as 500 billion euros (\$528 billion) will be needed over the next decade to help meet the bloc's security needs. Defense Commissioner Andrius Kubilius has indicated common defense bonds could raise that enormous sum. But moving ahead without Germany, the bloc's biggest member, is hard to imagine.

The big issues such as defense and competitiveness "require the fiscal and parliamentary resources of the biggest member states and the question is whether Germany and France are in a position to enable that at the European level," said Rahman.

"I think the answer is probably yes, but I feel a bit less certain than I would have had Germany and France not had this very difficult political time."

The article first appeared on The Associated Press.



The most urgent matter may be how to respond to US President-elect Donald Trump, who takes office on January 20. European officials are trying to defuse a potential trade conflict involving new US tariffs or import taxes on European goods that would seriously ding the continent's export-focused economy.

# Europe's center is not holding



By Anatol Lieven  
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## OPINION

office is doomed in the long run, and in the short run is a recipe for repeated political crisis and increasing paralysis of government.

Two countries are central to the European Union, the European economy, European defense, and any hope of European strategic autonomy: France and Germany. Within a month of each other, both have seen their governments collapse due to battles over how to reduce their growing budget deficits. In both cases, their fiscal woes have been drastically worsened by a combination of economic stagnation and pressure on welfare budgets with the new costs of rearmament and support for Ukraine.

Two main lessons are to be drawn from the fall of Michel Barnier's government in France.

The first is that talk of Europe massively re-arming itself and substituting for the US as the chief backer of Ukraine while maintaining existing levels of health care and social security is idiocy. The money is simply not there. The second is that the effort by "mainstream" establishments to exclude populist parties from

In both cases, the fiscal crisis has fed into the decay of the mainstream political parties that alternated in power for generations — a phenomenon that is to be seen all over Europe (and in the US, insofar as Trump represents a revolt against the Republican establishment). This decay is being fed by the growing backlash against dictation by the EU and NATO that is occurring across wide swathes of Europe.

In the French presidential elections of 2017 and 2022, Emmanuel Macron defeated the Front National (now the Rassemblement National) of Marine Le Pen by essentially uniting the remnants of all the centrist parties in a grand coalition behind himself. The problem with such grand coalitions of the center, however, is that they leave opposition nowhere to go but the extremes of Right and Left.

In the case of France, economic stagnation and resistance to Macron's free market and austerity measures led in June of this year to a crushing defeat for his bloc in European parliamentary elec-

tions. Macron then called snap French parliamentary elections in the hope that fear of Le Pen and the radical Left would terrify French voters back into support for him. The result however was that Le Pen won a plurality of the vote, and while electoral deals with the Left gave Macron's bloc a plurality of seats, they are heavily outnumbered by deputies on the Right and Left.

Macron then ditched his left-wing allies and stitched up an agreement whereby Le Pen would support a centrist-conservative government under Michel Barnier in return for concessions on immigration policy and other issues. Bizarrely, however, this was combined with continued "lawfare" against the Rassemblement National, with the prosecution of Le Pen for allegedly diverting EU parliamentary funds to support her party's deputies. This is something that looks rather like a technicality or peccadillo, given what we know of the past behavior of EU parliamentarians — but would

mean that, if convicted, she would be barred from running for the presidency in 2027.

This, of course, gave Le Pen every incentive to bring down Barnier's government in the hope that it would bring down Macron with it, and thereby lead to early presidential elections; and when Barnier's austerity budget (pushed through by decree against parliamentary opposition) infuriated the Left, Le Pen seized her chance. Given the string of defeats that Macron has now suffered (and remembering that the far greater de Gaulle resigned in 1969 after a far lesser defeat), it would make sense for Macron to step down. This would most probably lead to a presidency of the Rassemblement National; but then again, this is also probable if presidential elections take place on schedule in 2027. German politics are, in certain respects, tracking those of France but some years behind. Not long ago, one would have said a generation behind, but European political change is clearly speeding up. After the 2021 general elections, the de-



German Chancellor Olaf Scholz (2nd-R), French President Emmanuel Macron (R), US President Joe Biden (2nd-L), and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer gather in Berlin on October 18, 2024.  
● LISI NIESNER/REUTERS

cline in support for the Social Democratic party, and the rise of the right-wing populist Alternative fuer Deutschland (AfD) and the left-wing populist Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW) forced the Social Democrats into an uneasy coalition with two deeply ideologically opposed partners, the Liberals (FDP) and the Greens. As Germany's economic position worsened, internal battles over the budget also worsened until the coalition eventually collapsed. Opinion polls indicate that the centrist conservative Christian Democrats will come first in elections due in February, but will be far short of an absolute majority. The result will be a grand coalition with the Social Democrats; but if that also falls short of an absolute majority, and the Liberals fail to pass the five percent threshold to enter the German parliament, then (assuming a continued determination to exclude AfD and BSW), the Greens will have to be included.

Not only will this replicate the internal weaknesses and divisions of the last coalition, but it

will also mean that if Germany's economic woes continue and the coalition parties' popularity slumps, AfD and BSW will be the only place for discontented voters to go. These parties, being newer, are not yet nearly as popular as their French equivalents. AfD still has to go much further in the process initiated by Le Pen in the Front National, of purging its more extreme elements; and, of course, there is the special German historical fear of the radical Right. Nonetheless, there are good reasons to think that the future German trajectory will resemble that of France.

Meanwhile, large parts of the European foreign and security establishments write and talk as if none of this were happening; as if, in fact, these establishments had been permanently appointed to their positions by Louis XIV and Frederick II, and given by those sovereigns an unlimited right to tax and conscript their subjects.

Thus, in an article this week for Foreign Affairs, Elie Tenenbaum of the French Institute of Inter-

national Relations in Paris and a colleague declare that in response to Trump's election and in order to block a peace deal disadvantageous to Ukraine and "impose conditions of its own," Europe must "force its way to the negotiating table". A European coalition force of "at least four to five multinational brigades" should be deployed to eastern Ukraine to guarantee against further Russian aggression. European combat air patrols could be deployed "while the war is still underway". And "if Russia remains unyielding, Europe must bear the bulk of the financial assistance to support Ukraine in a protracted conflict."

Where the money and the public support for such a program is to come from is nowhere indicated. I don't know an appropriate and printable French response to these daydreams, but the Kremlin may reply with an old Russian saying: "Oh sure — when crabs learn to whistle."

The article first appeared on Responsible Statecraft.

# France's political institutions are creaking



President of Rassemblement National parliamentary group Marine Le Pen (C) reacts during the debate prior to the no-confidence votes on prime minister Michel Barnier's administration at the National Assembly in Paris, France, on December 4, 2024.  
● ALAIN JOCARD/AFP

Is this the twilight of the Fifth Republic? Founded by General de Gaulle with a custom-made constitution in 1958, it was designed to bring stability after decades of chaotic parliamentary rule, establishing a balance between parliament, on the one hand, and a head of state endowed with wide-ranging powers, on the other. The system became more presidential after a referendum held in 1962 led to the head of

state being elected by universal suffrage rather than by an electoral college. Unfortunately, this carefully crafted arrangement no longer seems to be working.

Jean-Louis Bourlanges, an experienced centrist politician and astute observer of political history who quit parliament last summer, says we are entering a new phase in this institutional balance. For a long time, the presidential and parliamentary

majorities were aligned, allowing left and right to alternate in an orderly manner. The era of so-called cohabitation began in the late 1980s when elections produced opposing majorities for the president and parliament. Presidents François Mitterrand and Jacques Chirac managed the arrangement with some success, governing with prime ministers from opposing parties. Cohabitation worked because



By Sylvie Kauffmann  
Columnist, editor

## OPINION

Marine Le Pen wore black for the vote of no confidence against the French government as if dressed for the funeral of a system that she claims to respect but works tirelessly to undermine. Meanwhile, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, leader of the leftwing La France Insoumise, watched from the visitors' gallery of the National Assembly as members began to cast their votes. Satisfied that his troops had obeyed his instructions, he left before the final tally was made. Thus did far right and far left join forces to bring down Michel Barnier's centrist government after a little more than three months, plunging France into the unknown. This is a new stage in the crisis opened by last summer's snap legislative elections, which failed to produce a majority. The crisis is now so deep that President Emmanuel Macron had to insist, in a stern televised address on Thursday evening, that he would not resign.

it was driven by mainstream parties — Chirac's centre-right Union pour un Mouvement Populaire and Mitterrand's Socialists — which shared the same vision of the political system. But these two parties collapsed when Macron bulldozed his way onto the political scene and won his first term as president in 2017. Marine Le Pen's far-right Rassemblement National flourished amid the ruins of the mainstream party system. Mélenchon took the radical route.

Macron defeated Le Pen to win a second term in April 2022, but saw his majority shrink and a large number of RN deputies enter parliament after the legislative elections that followed. Bourlanges believes that this is when Macron should have given more leeway to parliament and the prime minister; thereby rebalancing the relationship between the Elysée and the legislative branch of government.

Meanwhile, the demographic and cultural fabric of French society had changed. Issues that barely registered when the Fifth Republic was born — such as immigration, globalisation, and European integration — roiled the political landscape. And across Europe, new movements challenged the liberal democratic consensus.

The result was the tripartite parliament that emerged from this summer's elections, with three roughly equal blocs — left, centre, and far right — and no majority. These blocs, two of which contest the pillars of the existing settlement, hate each other and seem unable to cooperate except to bring down the government. This all points to a dysfunctional system.

This is why forcing Macron to resign would probably not solve anything. Since the constitution does not allow fresh legislative elections to be held before July next year, a new president still

would not have a parliamentary majority to govern with. Here is another flaw in the system: despite grand proclamations that the snap election had seen power shift from the Elysée Palace to the Palais Bourbon where the National Assembly sits, too many leading politicians — from left, right, and centre — are in fact driven by their desire to compete in the next presidential election in 2027. It is already a very crowded field.

For all this, few experts think the time has come to bury the Fifth Republic. The constitution, they argue, offers flexibility. As for Macron, he is gambling that the formidable spirit of unity and cooperation that enabled Notre Dame to rise from the ashes may yet inspire politicians — and make Le Pen's choice of mourning garb look premature.

The article first appeared on The Financial Times.



## FIVB Men's Club World Championship: Foolad remains unbeaten, marches into last four



Foolad Sirjan players celebrate a point during a straight-set victory over Praia Clube in Uberlândia, Brazil, on December 12, 2024.

● FIVB

### Sports Desk

Foolad Sirjan continued its perfect run at the FIVB Men's Club World Championship with a straight-set victory (25-16, 25-13, 25-21) over host Praia Clube in Uberlândia, Brazil.

Outside hitter Alireza

Abdolhamidi delivered another strong performance, leading the team with 18 points (16 attacks, one block, one ace) as the reigning Asian and Iranian champion cruised into the semifinals as the Pool A winner.

Opposite spiker Ali Ha-

jipour contributed with 14 points (12 attacks, two blocks), while veteran middle blocker Seyyed Mohammad Mousavi chipped in 10 points.

Outside hitter Maicon França and middle blocker Pietro Santos topped the scoring chart for the Bra-

zilian club with eight points apiece.

This was a third successive win for ex-Iran head coach Behrouz Ataei's men in the competition.

Foolad began its campaign with a sensational five-set victory over Cucine Lube Civitanova, coming from

behind to beat the Italian heavyweight 3-2 (25-21, 14-25, 24-26, 25-23, 16-14).

Foolad again had to fight back to defeat Egyptian side Al Ahly in four sets (19-25, 25-15, 25-21, 25-19).

Ataei's side will be looking to become the first Iranian club to lift the

world club trophy in the 19th edition of the competition.

The best result for the country came in the 2010 edition in Doha, Qatar, where Paykan walked away with the bronze medal after a win against Argentine club Bolivar.

## Tractor lands Bahrain's Al Khaldiya in ACL Two knockouts

### Sports Desk

Iranian club Tractor will continue its quest for a maiden Asian glory with a last-16 tie against Al Khaldiya of Bahrain at the AFC Champions League Two.

The draw for the first knockout round took place in the AFC headquarters in Kuala Lumpur on Thursday, where the 16 remaining teams discovered their fate in the continent's second-tier club competition.

The Bahraini club – runner-up to Saudi side Al Taawoun in Group B – will host the Persian Gulf Pro League leader in first leg on February 11, with the second leg to be played in Tabriz's Yadegar-e Imam Stadium seven days later.

Tractor was the comfortable winner of Group A with 10 points.

The winner of the tie will take on Al Taawoun or Qatari side Al Wakrah, which stood behind Tractor in the group table, in the quarterfinals.

Elsewhere in the last 16, Group C winner Sharjah FC was drawn against Al Hussein of Jordan, the Group D runners-up.

Spearheaded by Iranian striker Sardar Azmoun, Shabab Al Ahli, the second side from the UAE to advance to the knockout stage after sealing the Group D top spot, will meet Group C runners-up Al Wehdat – also from Jordan.

In the East matchups, Group E winner Sanfrecce Hiroshima of Japan will face Vietnam's Nam Dinh FC, which completed its Group G campaign in the second spot, while Singapore's Lion City Sailors FC, which topped a thrilling Group F, will square off against regional rival Muangthong United of Thailand, the Group H runners-up.

Group G winner Bangkok United of Thailand was drawn against Australia's Sydney FC, which finished second in Group E, while two-time AFC Champions League winner Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors FC of South Korea will meet Group F runner-up Port FC of Thailand.

The last-16 round will be followed by the quarterfinals in March and semifinals in April, before the tournament culminates in a single-leg final on May 17, 2025.

## Weightlifting World Championships: Iranians off the mark with triple medals



Iranian weightlifter Alireza Moeini won the men's 96kg snatch silver at the IWF World Championships in Manama, Bahrain.

● IWF

### Sports Desk

Iranian weightlifters Alireza Moeini and Ali Alipour bagged first medals for the country at the IWF World Championships in Manama, Bahrain, collecting a silver and double bronzes in the men's 96kg weight class. Moeini lifted 176kg, before failing with the 179kg attempt twice, but the first effort was enough for the Iranian to win the snatch silver, finishing behind Georgian Revaz Davitadze, who stood on the top podium with 177kg. China's Qian Feixiang took the bronze of the discipline with 175kg.

A tight clean & jerk contest later in the day saw the top three finish with a best lift

of 214kg, only to be separated by the different body weights.

Alipour, 20, began with a 205kg lift and then made the biggest jump of the session with a successful effort of 214kg, though he still had to settle for the bronze medal behind South Korean gold medalist Won Jong-beom and Nurgissa Adiletuly of Kazakhstan.

An overall tally of 387kg helped Alipour grab a second bronze medal of the afternoon, with Adiletuly (388kg) and Davitadze (387kg) taking the total gold and silver.

Moeini, meanwhile, finished 10th in the C&J standings with 202kg and stood seventh in the total table with 378kg.

Thursday's medals for Iran came after Reza Baghi had stood 14th in the men's 81kg contests with a 149kg-184kg-333kg record in Group B session, while North Korean dominated the weight class with a clean sweep of three golds. For Mirmostafa Javadi – a winner of five world medals, including last year's double golds in Riyadh – the men's 89kg competition was one to forget after he managed to register a single successful lift (162kg in snatch) and missed out on spot in the table.

Elaheh Razzaqi, the only Iranian in the women's competitions, recorded 95kg-125kg-220kg to finish 10th in the 76kg weight division.

● AFC

# Iran spends over \$10b annually to meet Afghan migrants' needs: *UN envoy*

## World to blame for failing to support Tehran

### International Desk

Iran's UN envoy said over six million Afghan nationals currently live in Iran as the Islamic Republic spends over \$10 billion annually to meet their needs amid the international community's indifference to the issue.

Amir Saeid Iravani made the remarks in an address to a UN Security Council meeting on Thursday on the situation in Afghanistan.

He criticized the international community for failing to support Iran in the face of problems stemming from the crisis in neighboring Afghanistan.

Iravani said Iran has shouldered a disproportionate share of problems stemming from Afghanistan's crisis, especially after the US withdrawal in 2021. The Iranian diplomat said all efforts must focus on enabling refugees' return by strengthening Afghanistan's capacity to

provide housing, jobs, and essential services.

"Iran is committed to actively supporting Afghanistan's political, economic, and social reconstruction, working towards a brighter future for its people while promoting regional peace and security. Western countries, whose prolonged occupation and abrupt withdrawal plunged Afghanistan into crisis, have a moral, legal and political obligation to contribute meaningfully to the country's rebuilding efforts," he said.

Afghanistan is still reeling from a decades-long US occupation and its hasty withdrawal which resulted in the country's lightning takeover by the Taliban.

"The irresponsible withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan in August 2021 has led to widespread migration from Afghanistan, placing significant pressure on Iran, which was already under unilateral and illegal sanctions", Iravani

said.

Iravani urged the international community to provide adequate and sustainable support to countries like Iran and Pakistan, which are facing ongoing challenges related to Afghanistan.

He highlighted a recent report from the UN Secretary-General regarding severe economic and humanitarian challenges in Afghanistan, noting that 23.7 million people, particularly women and children, still require urgent assistance.

"This situation poses a serious concern for neighboring countries directly affected by the humanitarian crisis," the Iranian diplomat said.

He also expressed Iran's deep concern about the ongoing drugs problem in Afghanistan, increasing threat posed by the terror group Daesh-Khorasan, restrictive measures against girls, women, and ethnic minorities in Afghanistan. Iran's Interior Minister Eskan-



dar Momeni recently said the country has no capacity to host more migrants. Iran has recently begun to repatriate illegal Afghan refugees

living in Iran.

The number of illegal immigrants in Iran is unofficially estimated to be around 10 million, with many seeking better

economic opportunities or fleeing conflict in their home country, especially since the 2021 takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban.

## UN chief calls for Israel's withdrawal from Golan buffer zone

United Nations chief António Guterres called for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the demilitarized zone in the strategically important Golan Heights in Syria.

Guterres said in a statement on Thursday that he was "deeply concerned by the recent and extensive violations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity."

"The Secretary-General is particularly concerned over the hundreds of Israeli airstrikes on several locations in Syria," the statement added, calling for urgent de-escalation "on all fronts, throughout Syria."

On Sunday, Israel troops seized land inside Syria's Golan Heights, adjacent to the territory it already illegally occupies there, just hours after militants swept president Bashar al-Assad from power.

Since then, the Israeli military has also launched hundreds of air and naval strikes against Syrian military assets, targeting everything to prevent them from falling into the hands of militants.

Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz ordered the military to "prepare to remain" throughout the winter in the UN-patrolled buffer zone that is supposed to separate Israeli and Syrian forces on the Golan Heights.

"Due to the situation in Syria, it is of critical security importance to maintain our presence at the summit of Mount Hermon, and everything must be done to ensure the (army's) readiness on-site to enable the fighters to stay there despite the challenging weather conditions," Katz's spokesman said in a statement on Friday.

Israel's measures in Syria have drawn reactions from many regional countries.

Iran, Qatar and the UAE on Thursday called for safeguarding Syria's national sovereignty and territorial integrity and stopping Israel aggression against the country.

They also stressed the need for serious efforts and action to bring an end to Israel's attacks on Syria's infrastructure.

It came after Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi held separate phone calls with his Emirati and Qatari counterparts to discuss the issue.

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps also said in a statement that the US and Israel are using Syria's instability to destroy its infrastructure. The Arab League also condemned Israel's "illegal actions" in Syria.

## Israel condemned over Gaza journalists 'massacre'

Israel has been accused of carrying out a "massacre" of journalists in Gaza in two separate reports from media freedom organizations this week that analyzed the deaths of reporters worldwide this year.

According to calculations from Paris-based Reporters Without Borders (RSF) published on Thursday, the Israeli army killed 18 journalists as they were working this year - 16 in Gaza and two in Lebanon - around a third of the total worldwide of 54, AFP reported.

"Palestine is the most dangerous country for journalists, recording a higher death toll than any other country over the past five years," RSF said in its annual report, which covers data up to December 1.

The organization has filed four complaints with the International Criminal Court (ICC) for "war crimes committed against journalists by the Israeli army". It said that in total "more than 145" journalists had been killed by the Israeli army in Gaza since the start of the war there in October 2023, with 35 of them working at the time of their deaths.

RSF described the number of killings as "an unprecedented massacre".

With foreign reporters prevented from entering the territory and local reporters being deliberately targeted, Gaza



Mexican journalists take part in a demonstration of solidarity with the colleagues detained, disappeared, and killed in Gaza in Guadalajara, Mexico, on December 5, 2024.

● ULISES RUIZ/AFP

was "a place where journalism itself is threatened with extinction", RSF said. In a separate report published Tuesday, the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) said that 104 journalists were killed worldwide in 2024, with more than half of them in Gaza.

The IFJ and RSF figures vary because of different methodologies used to calculate the tolls, but the IFJ used similar language to condemn Israel's military. "The war in Gaza and Lebanon once again highlights the massacre suffered by Palestinian (55), Lebanese (6) and Syrian (1) media professionals, representing 60 percent of all journalists killed in 2024," the IFJ said.

## IAEA says Iran okays enhanced oversight at Fordo nuclear site

### International Desk

Iran agreed to additional monitoring measures by the UN nuclear watchdog at its Fordo enrichment plant, after it announced plans to significantly increase its production of highly enriched uranium at the site, the agency said in a report seen by AFP on Friday.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said last week that Iran had revamped its Fordo Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP), south of Tehran.

The changes would "significantly increase the rate of production of uranium enriched up to 60 percent," the agency said.

The rate of production will jump to more than 34 kilograms of highly enriched uranium per month, compared to 4.7 kilograms pre-

viously, it added.

The IAEA called on Iran to implement inspections urgently, while European powers pressed Tehran to "immediately halt its nuclear escalation."

"Iran agreed to the Agency's request to increase the frequency and intensification of the implementation of safeguards measures at FFEP," the IAEA said in a confidential report seen by AFP.

Iran insists on its right to nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and has denied any ambition of developing weapons capability.

IAEA chief Rafael Grossi told AFP last week that Iran's expansion of enrichment was "a clear message that they are responding to what they feel is pressure."

Iran said last month that it would launch "new and

advanced" centrifuges in response to an IAEA resolution that censured Tehran for what the agency called lack of cooperation.

Nuclear tensions between Iran and the West have been simmering since Donald Trump withdrew from a landmark 2015 deal with Tehran during his first term as the US president, which had exchanged sanctions relief for limits on its nuclear program.

In 2019, Iran started to roll back the limits it had accepted under the deal after the other parties, especially the European ones, failed to live up to their commitments.

The agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was signed between Iran, the UK, China, France, Germany, Russia, and the US. Under the terms of the

JCPOA, which was endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 2231, all previous UN sanctions related to Iran's nuclear program can be re-imposed in the event of "significant non-performance by Iran of JCPOA commitments" (the snapback provisions).

Britain, France and Germany have told the United Nations Security Council that they are ready - if necessary - to trigger the so-called "snapback" of all international sanctions.

They will lose the ability to take such action on Oct. 18 next year when a 2015 UN resolution expires. The resolution enshrines Iran's deal with Britain, Germany, France, the United States, Russia and China that lifted sanctions on Tehran in exchange for restrictions on its nuclear program.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist



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# Iran, Russia sign MoU to enhance cultural, scientific collaboration

Gholamreza Amirkhani (2nd L), head of the National Library and Archives of Iran, and Vadim Duda (2nd R), director general of the Russian State Library, hold a memorandum of understanding signed on the sidelines of the BRICS National Libraries Summit, in Moscow, Russia, on December 10-11.



**Arts & Culture Desk**  
 In a formal meeting, the National Library and Archives of Iran and the Russian State Library signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) aimed at expanding mutual cultural and scientific cooperation between the two institutions. The agreement was formalized

during a meeting between Gholamreza Amirkhani, the Head of the National Library and Archives of Iran, and Vadim Duda, the Director General of the Russian State Library, IRNA reported. During the meeting, both parties discussed the expansion of their cooperation in various fields, including cultural, scientific,

and research areas. They emphasized the importance of multifaceted cooperation in different contexts. Duda highlighted the significance of fostering cultural values across countries, stating, "A platform for the exchange of cultural values among countries has been provided, so that cultural narratives can resonate positive-

ly and equally with each other." He also addressed the exchange of valuable items in contact with the historical treasures of Iran in the Russian State Library and a program for transferring copies from Russia to the National Library of Iran. Amirkhani, welcoming the proposals from the Russian State Library, stressed the importance

of this cooperation, saying, "This memorandum of understanding will not only strengthen the cultural and scientific relations between Iran and Russia but can also serve as a model for expanding cooperation on a global scale and among BRICS countries." Key aspects of the memorandum include the exchange of

scientific and cultural resources, organizing joint literary and cultural events, and developing research projects at the bilateral level. Within the framework of this memorandum, both parties agreed to facilitate the exchange of specialists for work on historical documents and the development of cataloging and digitization of archives.

## Iranian filmmaker wins top cinematography award at Knoxville fest



Farahbakhsh Farhidnia, a talented cinematographer, director, and editor from Iran's northern province of Mazandaran, was awarded the Best Cinematography Award at the Knoxville International Christian Film Festival in the United States. The festival's jury recognized Farhidnia for his outstanding work on the documentary 'I Won't Remain Alone,' directed by Yaser Talebi from Sari. The film tells the poignant story of an elderly couple in Mazandaran who, after five years, hear the heartbeat of their child once again, IRNA reported. The Knoxville International Christian Film Festival is a notable event in the realm of religious and international cinema, showcasing films from around the world that highlight spiritual and humanitarian values.

In addition to this recent accolade, Farhidnia was honored as the artist of the year in cinematography at the Mazandaran Cinema Celebration in 2023. His extensive portfolio includes contributions as a director, cinematographer, and editor across various cinematic works, documentaries, TV series, and programs, making him a prominent figure in the Mazandaran artistic community. The documentary, produced by Chosen Image under the management of Fariba Arab, has garnered several awards at various international festivals, including Best Documentary at the Saratov Sufferings International Film Festival of Documentary Drama in Russia (2021) and Best Short Documentary at the Today's Religion Film Festival in Italy (2021).

## Iran's Talebi joins jury of TRT Int'l Documentary Awards in Turkey

**Arts & Culture Desk**

Iranian documentary filmmaker Yaser Talebi from Mazandaran was invited to serve as a jury member for the 15th TRT International Documentary Awards in Turkey. The festival, known for its standing in the regional documentary scene, kicked off December 12 in Istanbul, showcasing a diverse array of films competing for various awards, ILNA reported. Talebi, a prominent figure in Iranian documentary cinema, joins the panel of judges that includes Imamura Keichi from Japan's NHK network, Turkish filmmaker Derviş Zaim, Turkish documentarian Zeynep Kececiler, and Bosnian journalist and researcher Arijana Saracevic.



Recognized for his impactful contributions to the documentary genre, Talebi was expressed gratitude by the festival organizers for his professional stature and body of work. He will also present his acclaimed film 'Destiny,' which will be screened out of competition. This documentary has previously received accolades, including the Best Documentary Award at the 63rd Krakow Film Festival in Poland. 'Destiny' tells the poignant story of a teenage girl's struggle to balance familial responsibilities, faith, and personal aspirations. Expressing his excitement about participating as a juror, Talebi remarked, "Being alongside international filmmakers and watching their works is a valuable experience." He also shared his enthusiasm for the special

screening of 'Destiny,' hoping that it will resonate with a new audience. The 15th TRT International Documentary Awards runs from December 12 to 15 in Istanbul, marking Talebi's fourth time serving on a jury at international festivals. Previously, he has been a juror at the International Outdoor Documentary Film Festival of China (OUTDOCS) in China in 2021, the Pambujan International Film Festival in the Philippines in 2022, and Diogenes in Tbilisi in 2022. Talebi's works have been showcased at various festivals, including IDFA, Berlinale, and HotDocs, and he is a graduate of cinema, as well as a member of the Iranian Documentary Filmmakers Association (IRDFEA). Over the years, Talebi has accumulated numerous awards, such as the Best Audience Award at HotDocs Canada, Best Director at the 63rd Krakow Film Festival in 2023, and many more, totaling around 20 international accolades for his impactful storytelling and directorial prowess.

## Future of Iran-Syria ...

Recent developments in Syria can be attributed to the convergence of several key factors. Russia's involvement in the Ukraine war and Moscow's significantly reduced military and political support for Damascus, the weakened position of Lebanese Hezbollah following recent conflicts with Israel, and Turkey's decisive support for Syrian opposition groups, including both terrorist groups and political opponents, along with undeniable deep public dissatisfaction with Syria's economic conditions, all contributed to this fundamental change. These factors, combined with the gradual erosion of forces loyal to the Damascus government, created conditions that allowed opposition groups to take control of the capital with unexpected

speed. The tripartite division has the potential for long-term conflicts. Unclear boundaries between zones of influence, disputes over natural resources, and regional power competition could lead to ongoing tensions. Additionally, this situation could serve as a model for the fragmentation of other countries in the region and create a wave of instability in the Middle East. As evident, the balance of power in the region has been severely affected by these developments. Turkey, as one of the main winners of these changes, is now in a better position to exert influence in Syria. Meanwhile, the resistance axis led by Tehran must update its capabilities and approaches in accordance with current developments to face

new threats likely to emerge soon from Turkey and other rival and enemy countries in our peripheral area. Syria's practical division creates significant security risks for neighboring countries - Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon. Refugee flows, cross-border violence, and potential sectarian tensions are likely to increase. Turkey, currently hosting over three million Syrian refugees, hopes that with Assad's fall, these refugees will return to their country. For Iraq and Lebanon, this instability could worsen their fragile political and economic situations. In the current circumstances, the international community must play a more active role in managing the Syrian crisis. The absence of a unified and internationally-recognized government

in Syria likely means continued sanctions, which could exacerbate the humanitarian crisis and create conditions for extremism to flourish. In this situation, efforts to create an inclusive governmental structure that considers the interests of all ethnic and religious groups appear necessary. Although the fall of the former regime and Assad's relinquishment of power was met with joy by Syrians dissatisfied with the status quo, it's unlikely that this political change will quickly lead to improved economic conditions in the country. In the coming months, as complex consequences of this instability emerge, we might witness positive and nostalgic feelings towards Assad's era and desires for his return to power! Overall, Syria's and the re-

gion's future depends on how this transition period is managed and the cooperation between regional and international actors. Success in this path requires a deep understanding of existing complexities and adopting a realistic and comprehensive approach. In these circumstances, our country, as one of the main allies of the Syrian nation and former political system, is naturally affected by developments in Damascus. However, our country can still preserve some of its interests in Syria by emphasizing and highlighting common ground between the two countries. Of course, there are many challenges in this path, the most important being the psychological and media warfare by resistance enemies who will try to shape an unfavorable image of Iran in

Syrian public opinion and thus prevent the preservation and development of ties between the Syrian and Iranian nations. Therefore, one of the Islamic Republic of Iran's most important approaches towards Syria should be utilizing media diplomacy and highlighting Iran's services and achievements in Syria and in serving the Syrian nation. We must recognize that today's Syria is no longer Assad's Syria, and naturally, our approaches, policies, and even expectations from this country should be adjusted according to current circumstances. Personally, I believe that in this new era, the country's cultural and media diplomacy should seriously focus on presenting a clear picture of Iran's historical role in Modern Syria.