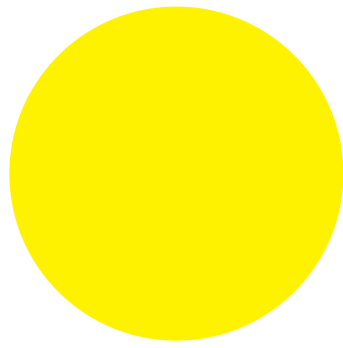


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# Iran Daily

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## Same Mistakes, Different Era: America's policies unchanged in 30 years

Newly declassified diplomatic memo uncovers decades of ignored warnings about US foreign policy failure

**EDITORIAL  
EXCLUSIVE**

**30 years of  
silence: Memo  
that could have  
changed  
everything**

A newly declassified diplomatic memo, written by US diplomat Wayne Merry in March 1994, provides a rare and candid perspective on America's foreign policy missteps following the Cold War. At the time, Merry was the chief of the internal politics division at the US Embassy in Moscow, a position that placed him in direct contact with the turbulent realities of post-Soviet Russia. His role involved analyzing Russia's domestic political landscape and advising Washington on how to navigate relations with the Yeltsin ad-

ministration during a critical period of economic and political instability. The memo, marked Unclassified on 09/12/2024, was released by the National Security Archive, a private research organization at George Washington University, as part of its ongoing efforts to shed light on critical moments in US foreign policy. The memo, titled 'Whose Russia Is It Anyway? Toward a Policy of Benign Respect,' critiques the US emphasis on rapid economic reforms—such as the controversial "shock therapy" approach—and

warns against overlooking the importance of fostering democratic institutions in Russia. Written during President Boris Yeltsin's tenure, a time marked by severe economic turmoil and political unrest, Merry's memo highlights the dangers of imposing Western economic models on a country unprepared for such drastic changes. He cautioned that these policies risked alienating the Russian populace, eroding goodwill towards the US, and strengthening anti-democratic forces.

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## NIGC: Iran sets record in sweet gas production, transmission



The deputy oil minister for gas affairs announced that daily sweet gas production in Iran's refineries has reached a record high of 865 million cubic meters (mcm).

Saeid Tavakoli stated that with an optimized network arrangement, the daily gas transmission volume has also hit 865 mcm, Shana reported.

The official highlighted that since the start of the current administration (August 2024), gas production in the country's refineries has seen a significant increase, saying, "During this period, numerous records have been achieved, the latest being the daily production of over 865 mcm of sweet gas in the country's gas refineries."

He added that in the gas transmission sector, utilizing the maximum capacity of pipelines and compression facilities, coupled with an optimized network configuration, has enabled the daily transmission of 865 mcm of gas.

Tavakoli, who is also the CEO of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC), pointed to the nationwide initiative to reduce gas consumption by 2%. He emphasized that this campaign will help stabilize the gas network and ensure efficient use of this natural resource, particularly benefiting people in underprivileged and remote areas.

The official stressed the importance of saving energy amid falling temperatures and rising gas consumption across the country.

"Energy conservation is a fundamental and critical issue that must be taken seriously. It will help address the energy shortages and preserve national resources," he noted.

Tavakoli further explained that maintaining a comfortable indoor temperature is the key to ensuring a stable supply of natural gas throughout the winter.

"Saving energy does not mean consuming less but consuming in a wise manner. An indoor temperature of 18 to 21 degrees Celsius is ideal, and if people adhere to this guideline, it will significantly alleviate energy deficit issues," he concluded.

# Iran, Russia to ink comprehensive cooperation agreement

**Ambassador:** Pezeshkian to visit Moscow in mid-January

### Economy Desk

Iran's ambassador to Russia announced that Tehran and Moscow are prepared to sign a comprehensive cooperation agreement during President Masoud Pezeshkian's visit to Moscow on January 17, 2025.

Kazem Jalali stated that the agreement would be signed by Pezeshkian and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin during the visit.

Jalali made the remarks during a meeting with Iranian students and officials from St. Petersburg's North-Western State Medical University as he was in the Russian port city to attend the Supreme Council meeting of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

Addressing the issues concerning Iranian students at Russian universities, Jalali also highlighted the International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC) as a key economic initiative between the two nations.

He noted that two Russian deputy prime ministers visited Tehran last Monday to discuss the corridor project with Iran's president and other officials.

The ambassador also referred to the planned gas transfer project from Russia to Iran, expressing optimism about its successful implementation in the near future.

Jalali emphasized Iran's growing involvement in the EAEU, particularly following the recent par-

ticipation of Iran's Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade in the union's meeting in St. Petersburg.

He described Iran's observer membership status as a step toward boosting trade relations with member countries.

The ambassador further highlighted lesser-known cultural ties between Iran and regions of Russia, including North Ossetia, Dagestan, Astrakhan, and others, noting the expanding cultural and economic relations between the two nations.

Iranian students, he said, act as cultural bridges and ambassadors of this growing relationship.

Jalali concluded by underlining the importance of people-to-people connections as the most enduring aspect of bilateral relations and urged increased involvement of Iranian businesspeople and private sector players in Russia to enhance economic ties.

On Monday, Pezeshkian said that his government is determined to complete the INSTC.

He made the announcement in a meeting with Vitaly Gennadyevich Savelyev, the Russian deputy prime minister for transport, as both sides discussed the expansion of bilateral relations and strategies for accelerating the completion of the strategic INSTC project.

Pezeshkian highlighted the priority of implementation of the Rasht-Astara railway project



as a part of INSTC under the Iran-Russia agreement.

He stated that Iran is committed to the terms of the agreement and called on the Russian side to begin mapping the route and preparing for project implementation as soon as possible.

"The Iranian government emphasizes the execution of this agreement, and our Minister of Roads and Urban Development [Farzaneh Sadeq-Malvajeri] is responsible for overseeing its implementation," Pezeshkian said.

For his part, Savelyev, extended warm regards from the Russian

president and prime minister to Pezeshkian and invited him to visit Russia in early 2025, saying that the Russian government is preparing for this visit and the associated negotiations.

Highlighting the Rasht-Astara railway project, Savelyev reaffirmed his government's commitment to its execution.

He noted that Russia has secured the necessary line of credit and is collaborating with Azerbaijan on the INSTC.

Savelyev also expressed the Russian government's desire to

expedite the implementation of the project, stating that Russia and Azerbaijan have agreed to modernize the portion of the railway located in their territories and called on Tehran to pave the ground for upgrading its section of the railway.

He described the increase in cargo transport between Russia and Iran as growing and expressed optimism that the implementation of the Astara-Rasht railway agreement could initially facilitate the transfer of 15 million tons of goods between the two countries.

## President, ministers open major development projects in North Khorasan



### Economy Desk

President Masoud Pezeshkian, along with senior cabinet members, inaugurated key infrastructure, energy, and housing projects during a two-day visit to Iran's North Khorasan Province, with the aim of advancing regional development.

A sum of 14 power projects were unveiled to strengthen the province's electricity infrastructure. These plans focus on modernizing power grids and expanding access to electricity in both urban and rural areas, providing reliable energy to support industries and communities, according to IRNA. Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadeq-Malva-

jerd opened 42 road and transportation projects, including highway development, rural road upgrades, and infrastructure improvements to ensure safer and more efficient transit.

The projects align with national efforts to modernize Iran's transportation network and bolster regional trade.

In the housing sector, 2,000 residential units were completed as part of Iran's National Housing Movement, addressing local housing shortages and improving living standards, ISNA reported.

The said projects highlight the government's commitment to affordable housing across provinces. Pezeshkian also emphasized the importance of

regional development during his visit, which included meetings with local officials to discuss strategies for economic growth and enhanced public services.

The trip concluded Thursday evening with a session of the Provincial Planning and Development Council, where long-term development plans were reviewed.

The high-profile delegation accompanying Pezeshkian included Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi, Agriculture Minister Gholamreza Nouri-Qezelgeh, and Roads and Urban Development Minister Farzaneh Sadeq-Malvajeri, who underscored the government's focus on addressing North Khorasan's needs.

## Iran, Saudi Arabia to expand ties in communications, IT sectors



### Economy Desk

The head of Information Technology Organization of Iran and the chairman of Saudi Arabia's Communications, Space, and Technology Commission (CST) emphasized strengthening cooperation and sharing experiences in various fields of communications and information technology during a bilateral meeting in Riyadh.

Mohammad Mohsen Sadr, on the sidelines of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in Riyadh, met with Mohammed Saud al-Tamimi, head of Saudi Arabia's CST, IRNA reported on Friday.

In their meeting, the two sides expressed a mutual desire to enhance collaboration in the communications and ICT sectors.

They discussed opportunities for cooperation, including the use of shared infrastructure, exchange of experiences in local IT platforms and messaging services, expansion of postal and fiber-optic collaborations, joint projects in artificial intelligence

(AI), and initiatives in tech-driven startups and tech-based businesses. The discussion also highlighted leveraging the expertise and capabilities of Iranian private sector companies in Saudi Arabia's large-scale ICT projects.

Both parties agreed to pursue these initiatives through a joint memorandum of understanding.

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) is an annual United Nations-organized event that brings together representatives from governments, the private sector, and academia to discuss internet governance issues. Information Technology Organization of Iran (ITO) as subsidiary of Ministry of Information and Communication Technology of Iran has been providing smart government services across the nation.

The main mission of ITO is to prepare and update the government's IT strategy, develop and maintain Government Service Bus (GSB), and help people use their mostly needed e-services through the national SSO (Single Sign On).

# International legacy of Doulab Cemetery in Tehran



## Iranica Desk

Doulab Cemetery is one of the remarkable sights in Tehran, situated in an old neighborhood of the capital. This cemetery serves as the resting place for notable non-Iranian individuals who once lived in Iran. Specifically, Doulab Cemetery is the old Armenian graveyard, where the graves of Armenian Christians are located. It contains the graves of 409 soldiers and 528 civilians. Officially established in 1936, it has not seen any burials for many years, IRNA wrote.

The cemetery is managed by France, Italy, and Poland, and it houses the graves of both famous and unknown individuals. A wooden gate opens onto a picturesque garden, and most of the graves are old, with the nationality of the deceased indicated by a flag. Among them are many unknown French individuals, including Simon Sardari, born in Montpellier, and Louis Capdor,

born in Gard, who passed away in 1966.

The gravestones in the cemetery are marked with crosses and belong to individuals from Russia, Poland, France, Italy, and Iranian Christians. They feature engravings of crosses, black-and-white photographs, and images of a sorrowful lady or the weeping Mary. Old tree branches cast shadows over some of the graves. The memorials of unknown soldiers from Russia, the tombs of French counts, Georgian princes, physicians of the Qajar and Pahlavi courts, and the mass graves of Poles who perished during World War II on their way back to their homeland can be found here, along with many notable figures from other countries, making this cemetery quite intriguing.

Doulab Cemetery is also known by various names, including the Polish Cemetery, Akbarabad Cemetery, Soleimaniyeh Cemetery, Orthodox Cemetery, Catho-



lic Cemetery, and Assyrian Cemetery. The history of Doulab Cemetery reveals that the first gathering of Armenians in Tehran occurred on the outskirts of the city's southern wall, specifically in the southern area of the Tehran Bazaar. The oldest church in Tehran, known as the Church of Sorp Georges, is locat-

ed in the Qavam al-Dowleh Bazaar. This church, which still stands today, was built in the late Qajar era and served as a symbol of the Armenian community at that time. The first Armenian cemetery was also established in that area but was later destroyed and became part of Tehran's residential

landscape. Subsequently, two new cemeteries were established: one in the Vank neighborhood, which became the new gathering place for Armenians, and another in eastern Tehran, in 1936.

Agha Muhammad Khan Qajar brought several Armenian war prisoners back to Iran from Georgia

and the Caucasus in 1795, directing them to settle in Tehran. He also relocated several other families from Karabakh to Iran. The Vank Cemetery later faced excessive destruction due to urban development, leading to the transfer of some of its valuable stones to Doulab Cemetery. The ownership of the Armenian cemetery belonged to the French government and was purchased by the embassies of France, Italy, and the representative of the Roman Catholic Churches in Iran. The Polish section was acquired by the Polish embassy in Iran in 1943. Spanning over 75,000 square meters, this cemetery consists of six distinct sections: the Armenian Apostolic Church, Eastern Orthodox (Russians, Georgians, and Greeks), Roman Catholics, Armenian Catholics, Assyrians, and Poles. Approximately 44,000 square meters belong to Armenians, 14,200 square meters to Catholics, 3,700 square meters to Orthodox Christians, and the remain-

der to Chaldean Assyrians. Notably, about 50% of the Catholic section is dedicated to Poles, while the rest includes graves of French, Italian, English, Czech, German, and other nationals. The largest part of the cemetery is the gravesite of 260 Polish exiles who perished during World War II, while the most haunting area contains the graves of 26 Italian miners who worked in Iran from 1936 to 1943. The architecture of their burial sites is such that upon entering this section, visitors are surrounded by standing figures of the deceased. The largest mausoleum belongs to Dr. Cloquet, the physician of Mohammad Shah Qajar. The Polish section of the cemetery is particularly notable, featuring two stone symbols adorned with representations of an eagle and a cross. These symbols bear an inscription in Polish, French, and Persian: "The cemetery of Polish exiles who fell asleep here on their return to their homeland."

## Avaj where stunning landscapes meet thriving tourism

Avaj, a charming city located in Qazvin Province, Iran, boasts an impressive suspension bridge that stands out as a remarkable engineering feat. Stretching 170 meters across a picturesque valley and overlooking the spectacular Shah Darreh Waterfall, this bridge is the second-largest suspension bridge in Iran.

With a width of one and a half meters and an elevation of 105 meters above the ground, it is designed to support a remarkable weight capacity of over 200 tons, ensuring a safe and enjoyable experience for visitors.

The Avaj Suspension Bridge is more than just a structural marvel; it is a key component of a broader tourism development plan initiated by the Avaj municipality. This initiative



aims to enhance the region's appeal to tourists and to create a sustainable economic framework grounded in tourism. By improving access to the stunning natural landscapes and attractions in the area, the

bridge plays a crucial role in transforming the local economy and providing new opportunities for residents. Nestled to the west of the city, the Shah Darreh Waterfall is a breathtaking natural attrac-



tion characterized by its dramatic descent through steep rocky cliffs. Visitors seeking to experience the beauty of the waterfall can take advantage of the convenient staircase that leads them to the top, where

they can relish the refreshing atmosphere and mesmerizing views that define the region's mountainous climate. In addition to the natural wonders, Avaj provides an array of tourism infrastructure that en-

hances the visitor experience. Travelers can find a variety of restaurants that offer local cuisine, along with accommodation options to suit different preferences. These facilities ensure that visitors can comfortably explore the area and fully immerse themselves in the natural beauty and cultural richness that Avaj and Qazvin Province have to offer.

Overall, the combination of the Avaj Suspension Bridge, the stunning Shah Darreh Waterfall, and the supportive tourism infrastructure highlights Avaj's potential as a burgeoning travel destination in Iran. This development not only promises to attract more visitors but also to enrich the lives of the local community through economic growth and cultural exchange.

# Are Syrian developments threat or opportunity for Iran?



By Nosratollah Tajik  
Former Iranian ambassador to Jordan

## INTERVIEW

**HAM MIHAN:** Given the recent developments in Syria, should Syria be considered a potential future source of threats to Iran, or is there a possibility that Iran can reach an understanding with the forces that will hold power in the future?

**TAJIK:** Since there are no shared borders or territorial disputes between Iran and Syria, under normal circumstances, neither Syria poses a threat to Iran nor does Iran pose a threat to Syria.

The current situation in Syria is highly ambiguous, and the final outcome remains uncertain. One scenario envisions relative stability in Syria, while another foresees a resurgence of civil wars with various factions. There is also the possibility of external aggression. Israel, for instance, has already acted aggressively, destroying 90% of Syria's military and armament infrastructure! So, we might even witness the fragmentation of Syria. On the whole, the situation in Syria is characterized by instability and unpredictability.

The current state of Syria is far worse than Iraq after Saddam Hussein's fall, Iraq in 2006 during the peak of internal conflicts, or even Libya post-Gaddafi. One of the most important reasons why I believe Syria's situation is extremely dire is the goals and desires of internal actors who may only be united in their opposition to Bashar al-Assad and nothing else. Furthermore, the conflicting and often contradictory territorial ambitions of multiple, opposing external powers in Syria create uncertainty about how actors such as Turkey and Israel will coexist, for example, regarding the Kurdish issue. Recently, Israel has demonstrated a strong territorial appetite in Syria, even now that Assad is out of the picture. We did not witness such conditions in Libya or Iraq.

Israel has shown that the issue of Syria is not merely a difference of political opinion to them; rather, they pursue geostrategic objectives in Syria that necessitate turning it into a scorched earth. However, regarding Iran, I believe that under any regime, Syria does not pose a direct threat to Iran. Nonetheless, the possibility of Iran

reaching an understanding with Syria's new rulers seems feasible to me. It is the country of Syria that holds strategic importance for Iran for various reasons, not the individual or group that eventually governs Syria.

During the Assad family's rule, Hafez al-Assad and later Bashar al-Assad maintained very close relations with Tehran due to the historical bilateral ties both before and after Iran's Islamic Revolution. Today, it is unclear how the future of Tehran-Damascus relations will unfold as it, above all, depends on who will govern Syria. Given the multitude of armed factions, as well as foreign interventions, the first step is to determine who will emerge victorious in Syria and gain the people's support. Whichever party gets to establish a legitimate and internationally recognized government in Syria, Iran can then forge reasonable relations with that government.

**Could past investments and financial, monetary, and commercial relations between the two countries complicate future relations?**

The only remaining issue is the past investments and financial, monetary, and commercial relations established between the two countries. These matters have legal solutions that international bodies and both countries can pursue. Once a stable and legitimate government is formed in



● HAPELINIUM/SHUTTERSTOCK

Syria, these issues can be resolved through legal mechanisms.

**Iran has always maintained relations at various levels with the Kurds in Syria. Is there a possibility that if Iran's interests in Syria are threatened by Turkey, Tehran would use Kurdish levers against Ankara's interests?**

Aside from the idea that Iran might use Kurds as leverage against Turkey, the issue of the Kurds is a fundamental and deeply rooted matter for Iran. Kurds reside in four countries in the Middle East — Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran.

Naturally, developments related to the Kurdish nation, whether in terms of relations among different Kurdish groups or the Kurds' relations with regional governments, are important to Tehran and are closely monitored by it.

Syrian Kurds have had ties with Iran for a long time. Particularly since 2011 and the ensuing developments in Syria, the Syrian Kurds and Iran have strengthened their relations. Given Turkey's role in recent Syrian developments and its military posture towards Kobani, Kurds believe they are on the brink of a military confrontation with Turkey. Naturally, Turkey's actions

could exacerbate some regional disputes. Although there are reports of an agreement between Kurdish groups and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) to hand over the management of oil-rich areas in Deir ez-Zor to Syria's new rulers, my prediction is that this region will not achieve peace easily or quickly, and tensions will persist in eastern and northeastern Syria.

**How do you view the prospects for understanding and agreement between Iran and the US regarding Syria if a dialogue between Tehran and Washington occurs in the future?**

On the surface, the US claims it has not played a role in the recent developments in Syria, but I believe the US has been one of the parties orchestrating and supporting these developments and is now taking this stance to avoid any political repercussions. It is unlikely that Turkey alone can provide the level of training, logistical support, and weaponry to HTS. I doubt Turkey alone possesses this level of financial, support, and military capability.

My guess is that the US and Israel have played a direct or indirect role in this matter. However, I also doubt that Iran and the US are prepared to engage in dialogue regarding Syria. Beyond the desires of both parties, the circumstances do not necessitate such talks. There are more important priorities that Iran and the US have better groundwork for dialogue and even cooperation on. Issues like Gaza and Lebanon could have provided a basis for dialogue between Iran and the US, but regarding Syria, I still see no grounds for dialogue. This matter currently, and at least from a regional perspective, needs to be addressed through local mechanisms.

**Can Iran rely on its connections with Sunni fundamentalist factions that currently hold power in Syria?**

Essentially, this appears to be one of the few paths available for Iran to engage with the new ruling factions in Syria, and there are no obstacles preventing Iran from using this route. Iran maintains interactions with various Sunni factions across the Middle East.

While the country's official policy might be to advance future relations in Syria



Regardless of how much the new Syrian ruling council disagrees with the former government, Syria still needs an army and military equipment to defend its sovereignty. Israel is truly exploiting the current situation, and one could say that Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the president of Turkey, has paved the way for one of the largest Islamic countries to fall into a dire and defenseless state.



▲ A Syrian opposition fighter holds a rocket launcher in front of the provincial government office, where an image of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad is riddled with bullets on the facade, in the aftermath of the opposition's takeover of Hama, Syria, on December 6, 2024.  
● GHAITH ALSAYED/AP

through formal and international diplomatic interactions, it does not conflict with building connections through various Sunni factions with the governing groups in Syria. Iran can use this approach to establish relationships and exchange messages with any ruling group in Syria, regardless of who they are, to lay the groundwork for reestablishing initial relations between the two sides.

However, there may be misconceptions on both sides. For example, al-Jolani, on the one hand, speaks about expelling Iran from Syria, and on the other hand, declares readiness for strategic engagement with Iran. If informal channels of interaction with Syria's new ruling council can be established and a minimal level of mutual trust regarding the future relations and policies of both sides is achieved, then formal and diplomatic engagement can follow.

Iran has previously collaborated with Sunni groups, whether in the form of the Muslim Brotherhood in Pal-

estine (i.e., Hamas), the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, or even Syria itself. I believe there are no obstacles to activating these channels, and we can use various strategies to enhance maneuverability for building trust and confidence with Syria's new ruling council.

**How likely do you think it is for Syria's border with Jordan to become insecure?**

I find it unlikely. Jordanians follow a policy of ensuring that the problems of neighboring countries do not spill over into Jordan. Jordan itself is a vulnerable community, and with around 700,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan — some estimates claim double that number — Jordan is affected not only politically and militarily but also socially by the situation in Syria. Moreover, due to Jordan's demographic composition, the country is highly susceptible to both internal as well as regional and international developments. Given the significant presence of individuals of Palestinian descent in Jordan,

ongoing developments can impact Jordan's situation. There is no doubt that the root cause of the current regional tensions is related to the Palestinian issue, and Jordanians strive to prevent additional tensions and conflicts from being imposed on them beyond what has already been imposed. I doubt that the Jordanian government would allow the borders between Jordan and Syria to be affected.

In the initial hours following the fall of Bashar al-Assad's government, we observed that on the same day, December 8, Jordan closed its borders with Syria. Overall, I find it unlikely that any incident will occur along the Jordan-Syria border. In my view, among Syria's neighbors, the most vulnerable borders belong to Turkey in northern Syria, where forces known as the Syrian National Army, supportive of Turkey, are stationed. To the east, the border with Iraq is also vulnerable, as internal conflicts in Syria could easily spill over into these two areas

more than into any other Syrian border.

**Do you think that Shia armed groups in Syria, who were previously trained and organized under General Soleimani, are currently dormant but may become active against the new order in Syria in the future?**

The forces that were trained in Syria as Basij or the Popular Mobilization Forces have apparently been integrated into the Syrian army and seem to have become irrelevant after the end of the conflicts in Syria. However, it is unlikely that these groups would take action. The root cause of the recent events in Syria largely stems from the Syrian army's unwillingness to resist insurgents. If we delve deeper into the factors behind the army's reluctance to resist, it might be primarily due to Syria's severe economic situation and the sanctions imposed by the US, which have crippled Syria's economy and led to extreme poverty among its citizens,

especially the Syrian army. Furthermore, one can point to Bashar al-Assad's lack of commitment to implementing structural and fundamental changes in the government and his inability to alter his approaches, which failed to endear the people to his regime. This has significantly damaged the Assad family's standing due to their reluctance to pursue necessary reforms and fundamental changes. Based on the available evidence, I doubt that the groups in question currently play any significant role in Syria's present situation, although future developments could lead to other arrangements. Overall, I find it unlikely that such groups can be relied upon. However, the reality is that Syria's future is so ambiguous and the conditions are so bleak and complex that making definitive predictions about the future is impossible.

**What do you know about Israel's future plans for Syria? Now that there are no military forces in Syria, do you consider Isra-**

**el's threats regarding its ability and plan to strike Iran as psychological warfare or a serious threat?**

Israel has completely destroyed one of the region's most powerful armies. Regardless of how much the new Syrian ruling council disagrees with the former government, Syria still needs an army and military equipment to defend its sovereignty. Israel is truly exploiting the current situation, and one could say that Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the president of Turkey, has paved the way for one of the largest Islamic countries to fall into a dire and defenseless state. However, I doubt that Israel's capacity to strike Iran through Syria has significantly increased as Israel has taken the same path before.

It is true that Syrians had radar and tracking capabilities in Syrian airspace, but Israel always targeted these radars. If Israel wanted to carry out an attack on Iran, it could easily use Syrian airspace. I believe that the strikes Israel made on Syrian military equipment

and armaments were intended to neutralize Syria as a threat and eliminate Syria's military capabilities for their own security.

Regarding Iran, I do not think these developments and Israel's access to Iran through Syria have much importance. Israel has previously utilized Syrian airspace, passing through southwestern Syria, and used Jordanian airspace. Accessing Iraqi airspace to strike Iran was not particularly complicated or difficult, either. Now, with the Syrian army dismantled, it might seem that a significant transformation has occurred regarding Israel's ability to attack on Iran. In reality, however, Israel has just eliminated a potential threat nearby. In other words, regardless of who controls Syria in the future, Syria cannot quickly rebuild its military capabilities and obtain the means to counter Israel if it seeks to reclaim occupied territories.

*The interview first appeared in the Farsi-language newspaper Ham Mihan.*



By Gholamreza Mansouri  
Political science expert

**OPINION EXCLUSIVE**

# Why did Assad fall?

*Before answering the reason for the rapid fall of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, we have to touch on how states theoretically survive. Every state needs four basic elements to survive, which are: nation, state, territory, and history.*

**Nation**

Every state relies on a mass of human beings or people. These people live together and also have a shared identity or characteristic or, at least, a common goal in mind. There is no doubt that states are in the hands of the people and the power of any government depends on their level of satisfaction. Of course, nationality itself is a modern political term that defines the overall identity of every human being in the world. It shows who belongs where and how everyone describes themselves with it. The extremely common nature of the feeling of belonging to a territory and a state indicates how deep the concept of nationalities runs among human societies.

In the case of Syria, its Kurds and Turkmens were part of the same society alongside Arabs, but their basic rights were ignored by the Assad government. We see that the name of the country was the Syrian Arab Republic, and the name of their national army was the Syrian Arab Army. These show that the Syrian nation failed to include their ethnic minorities.

**State**

The second element is the state. Its sovereignty includes the entire territory of that country. Of course, there are two types of states or governments. In the West or developed countries, there are con-

ventional pluralistic governments that are built with the participation of all social entities such as both minorities and majorities, whether they are differentiated by religion, language, or anything else. Another form of state belongs to undeveloped countries. Syria was one of them. There was no type of participation in the creation of its sovereignty as Syria's power was controlled by oligarchs or some minorities. Let us not forget that the government or state has the exclusive right to use power. The Baath Party, which controlled the army and the state, ruled the country without allowing the participation

of ordinary people or the elites of society.

**Territory**

Every country has its own borders that define its territory. After the 1967 war, part of Syria was occupied by Israel, and even after the Arab Spring in 2011, Syria lacked territorial integrity due to the establishment of a Kurdish autonomous government by the SDF forces in the country's northeast. For this reason, the government was not at all useful in

its territory and lacked the necessary efficiency.

**History**

The most important element that makes states stronger is history. History can create a common sense of existence between people. States can also use history as an element to build great people. Syria has a great history as a land of pluralities. In the past, Syria was the homeland of some pivotal civilizations. Due to its geopolitical location, it has connected various cultures, thoughts, and religions throughout history, which has enriched its cultural



Two men stand in a cemetery near the site of a suspected mass grave in Najha, a southern suburb of Damascus, on December 14, 2024. Thousands of bodies are thought to be buried here, but excavations and identification procedures have not started yet.  
● LORENZO TUGNOLI/THE WASHINGTON POST

heritage in return. However, these lessons were ignored by the Assad government as it chose to define Syria in a different way that weakened the national identity of Syrians. In fact, I think, more than anything, the denial of history led to the denial of Assad's Syria. Of the four elements need-

ed to build a strong modern state or government, Syria had all four, but due to wrong policies and external pressures — such as numerous Israeli attacks and Western sanctions — it could never become a developed and strong country. The accumulation of popular demands, espe-

cially in the economic and welfare arenas, and the government's inability to respond to them ultimately fanned the flames of a war against the Assad government in 2011, and 14 years later, the Syrian government was overthrown by armed rebel groups.



A little girl waves Syria's new flag in eastern Aleppo.  
● SKY NEWS

## Asian Youth and Junior Weightlifting Championships:

# Iran grabs 50 medals, wins men's junior title

### Sports Desk

Iran enjoyed a prolific run at the Asian Youth and Junior Weightlifting Championships, collecting a remarkable 50 medals across the men's and women's competitions.

The pinnacle of the Iranians' campaign in Doha came in the men's junior contests, where the 10-man squad tallied 727 points to beat Uzbekistan (684pts) and Saudi Arabia (594pts) to the title. Superheavyweight Hamidreza Mohammadi brought the curtain down on a glorious campaign for Iran on Wednesday, registering a

177-225-402 performance to make a clean sweep of three silver medals in the men's junior +109kg event.

There was further final-day glory for the country in the women's draw, with Sara Safaverdi winning the snatch silver in the +87kg class with a best effort of 100kg, while Ma'soumeh Hosseini settled for the snatch bronze in the youth +81kg event. Iran stood fourth in a tight women's junior race with 577 points, following Kazakhstan (598pts), Chinese Taipei (586), and India (584). Ariya Paydar headlined Iranian men's

medal haul in the Qatari capital with three golds in the junior 109kg event. Mehrab Davasari, Amir Mohammad Rahmati, Hamidreza Zarei, and Amirhossein Sepah were also among the gold winners, as Iran finished with eight golds, 15 silvers, and 12 bronzes.

Haniyeh Sharifi, meanwhile, spearheaded Iranian women across the youth and junior categories with the total and C&J golds, as well as the snatch silver in the junior 71kg contests. Iranian girls bagged double golds, five silvers, and eight bronzes.



● IWFFR

## Tsitsipas hoping to 'reinvent' himself in search for stability



● GETTY IMAGES

**REUTERS** – Two-time Grand Slam finalist Stefanos Tsitsipas said on Friday he needs to break out of a rut and start afresh in 2025 after winning just one title in the previous campaign and dropping out of the world's top 10.

The Greek world number 11, who claimed his only win at the Monte Carlo Masters, has also ended his collaboration with his father Apostolos as his coach.

"I'm looking at kind of reinventing myself,"

said Tsitsipas, who begins his season at the Dec. 27-Jan. 5 United Cup mixed team event. "I felt like I've been stuck in a pattern over the last few months. I haven't been able to kind of unlock the pattern. "I'm looking for a

fresh, new 2025. That doesn't mean to suddenly just start winning everything.

"It's just to see a trajectory of constant improvement and improving in all fields in my career, but also in my outside life... I want to have stability in my life," he told reporters.

Tsitsipas is starting the year outside the top 10 for the first time since 2019 and he hoped that would take some of the pressure off him. "I don't think there's that much pressure when you're outside of the top 10. Well, probably there is some pressure in terms of like now it's my opportunity to add on points and get some good weeks going," he said.

The United Cup will serve as part of Tsitsipas' preparations for the Australian Open, where the 26-year-old reached the final in 2023.

## Man United 'just have to survive', says Amorim after Wolves loss

**THE GUARDIAN** – Ruben Amorim said Manchester United must adopt survival mode to end their miserable run after a fourth defeat in five Premier League matches dropped them to 14th, eight points above the relegation zone.

United's Portuguese manager blamed the lack of time to coach his players as a barrier to progress after a sapping Boxing Day defeat at Wolves, where his captain, Bruno Fernandes, was sent off early in the second half after picking up a second yellow card.

Amorim is the first United manager to lose as many as five of his first 10 games in charge of the club in all competitions since Walter Crickmer in January 1932.

"I manage but I didn't train [the players]," said

Amorim, who replaced Erik ten Hag six weeks ago. "They need time to train, they are completely changing the way of playing, it is really hard on them and for the staff to pass on all the information. When you don't have results, it's even harder for them to believe.

"In this moment we just have to survive and to win some time to work on the team. We already knew it. I started this job, with the team, the new idea, without any time to train, with a lot of tough games. It is a long journey. We have to continue to fight these bad moments. We need time to work. We also have to win games to sell the idea to the players. If not, it is really hard."

Wolves scored di-

rectly from a corner through Matheus Cunha, a near-identical goal to the one Son Heung-min scored in Tottenham's 4-3 Carabao Cup quarter-final victory last week. Cunha admitted his teammates were asked to "manage" the United goalkeeper André Onana by unsettling him. Asked whether United can think about qualifying for Europe, Amorim replied: "We have to work on a lot of things in our club, inside the pitch, outside the pitch, so let's focus on each game, each time. We have to use every minute of training and to improve the team."

● GETTY IMAGES



## Four last-gasp finishes on dramatic night in NBA

**BBC** – The Portland Trail Blazers' Scoot Henderson scored the game-winning basket with 0.1 seconds remaining in one of four last-gasp finishes in the NBA on Thursday. Henderson's step-back jumper gave the Trail Blazers two points and sealed a 122-120 win against the Utah Jazz. In Miami, Tyler Herro sunk

a 15-footer with 0.5 seconds to go to complete an 89-88 for the Miami Heat against state rivals the Orlando Magic.

There was still time for Orlando to have the last shot but Jalen Suggs' long three-point attempt rimmed out and was ruled to have come after the buzzer.

The most unlikely win came for the Detroit Pis-

tons as Jaden Ivey scored a three-pointer while being fouled, with 3.1 seconds on the clock, and sunk the subsequent free throw to complete a 114-113 win against the Sacramento Kings.

The Pistons had trailed by 10 points inside the final three minutes.

And in Washington, Jordan Poole's three-pointer with

8.7 seconds left helped the Washington Wizards beat the Charlotte Hornets.

Poole's basket put the Wizards 112-110 ahead before Charlotte's Brandon Miller missed from distance with six seconds to go, and Washington's Justin Champagnie hit one of two free throws as the Wizards completed a 113-110 victory.

Washington trailed by 21 points in the first half and remain bottom of the Eastern Conference despite a fifth win of the season.

In Thursday's other fixtures, the Oklahoma City Thunder beat Indiana Pacers 120-114 for their ninth straight win.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 45 points for the

Western Conference leaders.

The Memphis Grizzlies, currently third behind the Thunder, scored 155 points – the most in their franchise history – in a 155-126 win against the Toronto Raptors.

Jalen Johnson scored a career-high 30 points to help the Atlanta Hawks come from behind to beat the Chicago Bulls 141-133, Jalen Green scored 30 points as the Houston Rockets beat the struggling New Orleans Pelicans 128-111 and Cameron Johnson scored 29 points in the Brooklyn Nets 111-105 victory against the Milwaukee Bucks.

# Iran FM: Trip to China aimed at consulting on international issues

## International Desk

Iran's top diplomat, who touched down in China's capital on Friday for a two-day visit, said his trip is aimed at consulting with Chinese officials on bilateral ties and regional and international issues including Iran's nuclear issue.

Abbas Araghchi told reporters in a video published by Iranian state media as he arrived in Beijing that the visit was taking place "at a very suitable time." Referring to numerous consultations held between Tehran and China on different international issues over the past years, the Iranian foreign minister said, "Now, there exists critical circumstances. Not only the region abounds with various tumults, but also there are various [thorny] issues at the international level, also our nuclear issue in the new year will face a situation that needs more consultations."

"The invitation of our Chinese friends was for this reason, that at the beginning of the new year... we should think together, consult and be ready for the challenges that will come."

In an article published by China's of-

ficial People's Daily newspaper on Friday, Araghchi said his visit to China will open a "new chapter" in strategic cooperation between the two countries and herald a "golden" era for bilateral relations.

"The next golden 50 years of Iran-China relations will demonstrate that this visit marks the beginning of a new chapter of strategic cooperation between the two countries," he wrote. The top Iranian diplomat also noted that Iran and China have long engaged in "practical cooperation" to promote multilateralism and develop indigenous values, adding that both sides have defended each other's fundamental interests in international forums. He also hailed "pragmatic" Iran-China ties, citing close political and defense coordination, exchange of high-level delegations, as well as cooperation in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the BRICS group of emerging economies, and the Beijing-brokered deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia in March 2023.

Chinese President Xi Jinping pledged in October to increase ties with Iran

during talks with his counterpart Masoud Pezeshkian in Russia on the sidelines of a BRICS summit.

"Iran and China share common interests and concerns not only at bilateral and regional levels, but also at the trans-regional and international levels," Araghchi emphasized.

"While firmly believing in the significance of multilateralism and the benefits of joint cooperation towards the prosperity of human society, both countries keep cooperating closely in multilateral mechanisms, including the SCO and the BRICS."

China is Iran's largest trade partner. Both states are subject to different levels of illegal sanctions imposed by the US.

The two countries signed the long-term strategic partnership deal in March 2021 to reinforce their long-standing economic and political alliance.

In his article, Araghchi said that West Asia is facing numerous challenges, the core of which is the Palestine issue.

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza, caused by the Israeli genocide and supported by some world powers, has



been exacerbated by the inaction of the international community and irresponsible behavior of some parties, he noted.

Iran and China believe that an immediate cease-fire in Gaza and the delivery of humanitarian aid are now the most important priorities, he said. The Iranian foreign minister further

referred to the recent developments in Syria, urging respect for the country's unity, national sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

Tehran, he pointed out, believes that the Syrian people should decide the future of their country without destructive intervention or external imposition.

## Syria's new rulers warn against incitement as tensions brew

Syria's new authorities on Thursday launched a security crackdown in a coastal region where 14 policemen were killed a day before, vowing to pursue "remnants" of the ousted Bashar al-Assad government accused of the attack, state media reported.

The violence in Tartous Province, part of the coastal region that is home to many members of Assad's Alawite sect, has marked the deadliest challenge yet to the new authorities which swept him from power on Dec. 8, Reuters reported.

The security forces launched the Tartous operation to "control security, stability, and civil peace, and to pursue the remnants of Assad's militias in the woods and hills", state news agency SANA reported.

The crackdown was announced as the Damascus authorities warned of an attempt to incite sectarian strife, after a video dating from late November circulated on social media showing a fire inside an Alawite shrine in Aleppo. The interior ministry said unknown groups perpetrated the violence and that its forces were working "night and day" to protect religious sites.

Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the former Al-Qaeda affiliate which led the mili-



Fighters affiliated with Syria's new administration stand guard on the streets of Syria's western coastal city of Latakia on December 26, 2024.   
AAREF WATAD/AFP

tant campaign that toppled Assad, has repeatedly vowed to protect minority groups. Many members of minority groups, including Christians, are worried about the policies of the new rulers.

In a predominantly Alawite neighborhood of Damascus, Alawite sheikh Ali Dareer said that homes had been vandalized and people beaten on the basis

of their religious identity, despite HTS promises the sect would be treated with respect. He blamed "a third party" trying to incite discord.

Dareer told Reuters that the community had extended its hand to the new government but there "have been many violations", citing multiple accounts of people being beaten at a checkpoint.

An HTS fighter in the area said there had been an incident on Thursday in which Alawites were taken off a bus and beaten because of their religion, but denied that HTS was responsible.

"This is a matter of sedition, and we don't want to be dragged into it," Dareer said. "Thousands of people are filled with resentment, anxiety, and their dignity is offended," he said. "However, we must remain committed to peace."

Underlining sectarian tensions, protesters chanted slogans during a rally outside local government headquarters in Tartous, images posted on social media on Wednesday showed.

Mohammed Othman, the newly appointed governor of the coastal Latakia region adjoining Tartous, met Alawite sheikhs to "encourage community cohesion and civil peace", SANA reported. The Syrian information ministry declared a ban on what it described as "the circulation or publication of any media content or news with a sectarian tone aimed at spreading division".

## Yemen launches missile attack on Israeli targets



### International Desk

Yemen on Friday said they carried out new military operation against Israel, using a hypersonic ballistic missile.

The Yemeni Armed Forces in a statement on Friday said they "carried out a specific military operation targeting Ben Gurion Airport in the occupied area of Yaffa [Tel Aviv] using a hypersonic ballistic missile of Palestine2 type".

The statement said the armed forces also targeted a ship in the Arabian Sea.

Israel's military earlier Friday said "one missile that was launched from Yemen was intercepted before crossing into Israeli territory."

There was no immediate comment on the other attacks claimed by Yemenis.

The latest attack by the Yemenis came after Israeli raids pounded Sana'a's international airport and other targets in Yemen on Thursday.

On Thursday, Israeli warplanes attacked Sana'a airport where the head of the World Health Organization, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said he was waiting for a flight. Four people died in the airport attack and around 20 travelers and staff were wounded, a Yemeni official said on Friday. The WHO chief said one of his plane's crew was among the injured.

The strikes against what Israel's military called Ansarallah's "military targets" left six people dead in total, according to Yemeni media, and came a day after Yemen launched missile and drone attacks on Israel. Sana'a's international airport resumed services at 10:00 am

(0700 GMT) on Friday, Deputy Transport Minister Yahya al-Sayani told a press conference.

The airport's control tower was "directly hit," along with the busy departure lounge, he said.

On Friday, the top of the control tower was a bombed-out shell and large windows in the airport building were shattered, with glass littering the ground.

"The attack happened when there were a lot of passengers and a plane departing at 7:00 pm," Sayani said.

"There was another plane planned to land and it did land directly after the attack."

A series of strikes were also carried out against a power station in Yemen's strategic western port city of Hudaydah, the al-Masirah television channel reported. The statement by the Yemen's Armed Forces also said that Israeli "aggression will only increase the determination and resolve of the great Yemeni people to continue supporting the Palestinian people".

Yemenis have declared their open support for Palestine's struggle against the Israeli occupation since the regime launched its devastating war on Gaza on October 7, 2023, which has so far killed more than 45,000 Palestinians, mostly women and children.

Ansarullah has been also targeting ships linked to Israel, the United States, and the United Kingdom to force an end to the Tel Aviv regime's genocidal war on Gaza. The Yemeni Armed Forces have said they will not stop their attacks until Israel's ground and aerial offensives in Gaza end.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist



# Oskouei's portrait wins gold at Kyrgyzstan photography festival

## Arts & Culture Desk

A portrait titled 'Loneliness' by renowned Iranian photographer, documentarian, and researcher of photographic history Mehrdad Oskouei, clinched the gold medal for Best Portrait at the 6th Annual Viktor Polinsky International Photography in 2024, held in Kyrgyzstan. The festival featured a panel of judges,

including Maja Stosic from Serbia, Alexander Sasich from Ireland, and Mohammad Reza Chaiforoosh from Iran, who evaluated the submissions. In total, seven of Oskouei's photographs were accepted for the competition, with 'Loneliness' earning the gold medal in the portrait category. Plus, two of his other photographs received honorary mentions at the festival, underscoring Oskouei's exceptional talent and versatility.

Viktor Polinski (1965-2013) was a prominent Russian photographer known for his impactful work in Kyrgyzstan, where his images were widely utilized, including on currency, in election campaigns, publications, and books. Beyond his professional photography, Polinski contributed to the field by founding a photography school that bears his name, dedicated to educating aspiring photographers.

The Viktor Polinski Award is organized under the auspices of the International Federation of Photographic Art (FIAP), the Photographic Society of America (PSA), the Focus Photo Club of Iran, and the International Association of Art Photographers (IAAP). Photographs that succeed in this festival are archived under both FIAP and PSA, and they also count towards the qualifications for FIAP and PSA titles.



# Iran signals readiness to establish joint science, technology park with Iraq

## Social Desk

Iran expressed its readiness to establish a joint science and technology park with Iraq, in a significant move to strengthen academic and technological ties.

During a meeting between Iran's Minister of Science, Research and Technology Hossein Simai Sarraf, and Iraq's Deputy Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Professor Haider Abd Dahed, both sides underscored their commitment to enhancing scientific cooperation in various fields, including student exchanges and research initiatives, ILNA wrote.

Simai Sarraf emphasized Iran's eagerness to welcome a greater number of Iraqi students, particularly in border regions where several prominent universities are located. "We are prepared to accept motivated and talented Iraqi students at our best universities," he stated, while highlighting the necessity of studying in Persian, an idea that has received support from the Iraqi government.

The Iranian minister further elaborated on the potential for collaboration, saying, "While we are ready to establish a joint science and technology park with Iraq, the various dimensions of this project



need to be carefully studied." He noted that the Iraqi side showed a keen interest in leveraging Iran's experiences in developing technology parks.

In response to Iraq's proposal for Iranian students to study in Iraq, Simai Sarraf welcomed the idea and mentioned the allocation of 100 scholarships for Iranian students, contingent upon the establishment of suitable conditions for implementation. Dahed shared insights on Iraq's legislative progress, noting that the successful experience of Iran in developing its technology ecosystem has served as a model for Iraq. "We have drafted legal frameworks for establishing a science and technology

park in Iraq based on Iran's experience," he stated, adding that the specifics of the collaboration will be finalized during an upcoming meeting of Iranian and Iraqi universities in Karbala.

He also pointed out the substantial number of Iraqi students currently studying in Iran, reiterating the importance of these students learning Persian to better understand Iranian culture and knowledge. Dahed extended an invitation to Simai Sarraf to attend the joint meeting of Iranian and Iraqi universities in Karbala, further solidifying the collaborative spirit between the two nations in the realm of education and technology.

# Women increasingly participating in Qur'anic studies: Minister

Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Abbas Salehi, emphasized the significant presence of women from the Islamic world, particularly from Iran, in Qur'anic and Islamic studies.

"Women are increasingly participating in Qur'anic sciences and concepts," he added, IRNA wrote.

During his speech on December 26 at the 16th international conference on women Qur'an scholars, Salehi traced the historical journey of women in Islamic scholarship, highlighting three distinct periods since the advent of Islam.

He remarked, "In the first period, during the early years of Prophethood, women were fully engaged in Qur'anic sciences." He elaborated that this initial phase was characterized by the robust involvement of women in Islamic knowledge.

Citing historical accounts, Salehi pointed out that women constituted a significant portion of the Prophet Muhammad's companions, stating, "According to one-seventh of the Prophet's companions, women played a crucial role." However, he noted that the second period saw a decline in women's participation in Qur'anic studies, coinciding with a broader decline in Islamic civilization.



The minister asserted that the past few decades have marked a resurgence of women's involvement, akin to the early days of Islam. Salehi emphasized that the path taken by women Qur'an scholars today is a continuation of the legacy established by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Reflecting on the historical trajectory, Salehi stated that there was a time when women were not considered a secondary gender in Islamic education and understanding. "This enlightened era in Islamic history contrasts sharply with periods when women's roles in scholarly pursuits diminished," he commented. Salehi lamented that women were often confined to harems, further isolating them from the academic and scholarly community. However, he expressed optimism about the current third period, which is marked by the visible presence and contributions of women in Islamic sciences across the Islamic world, particularly in Iran.

# Same mistakes, different ...

Despite the memo's foresight, it was largely dismissed by Washington policymakers, buried deep in diplomatic archives, and its author faced significant professional repercussions. Merry's dissenting views, which clashed with the prevailing orthodoxy of promoting free-market economics at all costs, rendered him a pariah within the State Department. After his three-year term at the Moscow embassy, he found himself sidelined, and his career in the foreign service was effectively stalled.

This newly revealed document, declassified after being hidden for nearly 30 years as the result of a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit, underscores the consequences of ignoring dissenting voices in policy discussions. It also serves as a stark reminder of the risks of applying a one-size-fits-all approach to foreign intervention. Merry argued that prioritizing market-driven reforms over democratic development was a mistake that could

reignite adversarial relations between Russia and the West—a warning that seems prescient in light of Russia's subsequent trajectory under Vladimir Putin.

Today, this memo is not just a historical document but a call for reflection. It raises urgent questions about the lessons Washington has—or has not—learned as it continues to engage with complex global challenges. Merry's insights highlight the importance of understanding local contexts, respecting the agency of nations, and valuing dissent within policymaking—a message that resonates strongly in an increasingly interconnected and volatile world.

**Key insights from memo**  
**Misguided focus on market economics:** Merry's memo criticizes the US for overemphasizing free-market reforms in Russia, arguing that these policies, such as the shock therapy promoted by US economists, were ill-suited to Russia's economic reality. Merry warned that the rush to

privatize and implement market reforms against the backdrop of Russia's fragile democracy could alienate the Russian people and deepen economic disparities. He noted that most Russians did not associate market forces with positive ethical outcomes and were wary of economic theories pushed by Western advisors. The memo called for a more nuanced understanding of Russia's needs, stressing that the focus should be on helping Russia develop democratic institutions rather than imposing Western economic models.

**Call for respect and patience in US foreign policy:** Merry urged a shift in US foreign policy towards Russia, advocating for a "benign respect" that would recognize the complexity of Russia's political and economic transformation. He argued that the US should support Russian democracy but not impose specific economic models. Merry emphasized that US officials were often perceived by Russians as condescending and

overly eager to experiment with their country's future. The approach of "assistance tourists," as Merry described it, not only contributed to the perception of foreign interference but also undermined the legitimacy of democratic forces in Russia. He suggested that the US should prioritize helping Russia develop sustainable democratic structures rather than pushing for rapid economic changes that could destabilize the country further.

**Rejection of dogmatic economic policies:** Merry's memo also critiqued the dogmatic view that free markets and democracy were inherently linked. He pointed out that while markets may operate without democracy, the reverse was not true: democracies could exist without free markets. The memo's call for a balanced approach—one that emphasized democratic development alongside cautious economic reforms—was a sharp contrast to the prevailing orthodoxy in Washington at the time,

which largely viewed free-market capitalism as the necessary foundation for a democratic society.

## Lessons for today: Relevance of Merry's memo

The lessons embedded in Wayne Merry's 1994 memo remain strikingly relevant today. First, it highlights the dangers of imposing one-size-fits-all solutions to complex geopolitical issues. US policymakers' failure to understand Russia's unique context led to policies that not only failed to stabilize the country but also contributed to the rise of anti-democratic forces. Second, the memo underscores the importance of listening to on-the-ground experts, rather than relying solely on abstract ideological frameworks or academic theories. Merry's warning about the consequences of ignoring local realities resonates strongly in today's complex global landscape, where the West's interventions often fail to achieve desired outcomes due to

a lack of understanding of local dynamics.

Moreover, Merry's experience serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of suppressing dissent within government circles. The "dissent channel," which was meant to encourage honest, critical feedback, was ultimately used against those who expressed opposing views, stifling constructive criticism and preventing meaningful policy debate. This lesson remains pertinent in today's political climate, where openness to diverse perspectives is critical for making informed decisions.

In conclusion, revisiting Merry's memo today offers a valuable opportunity for reflection. It serves as a reminder that successful foreign policy is built not on unilateral power or simplistic economic prescriptions, but on respect, understanding, and support for local democratic processes. As the global political landscape becomes ever more complex, the lessons of the past are more important than ever.