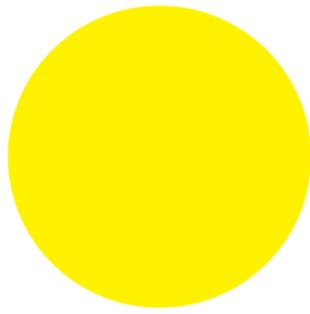


Iran expedites Afghan deportations in spy hunt after Israel aggression

Nearly half a million illegal migrants expatriated

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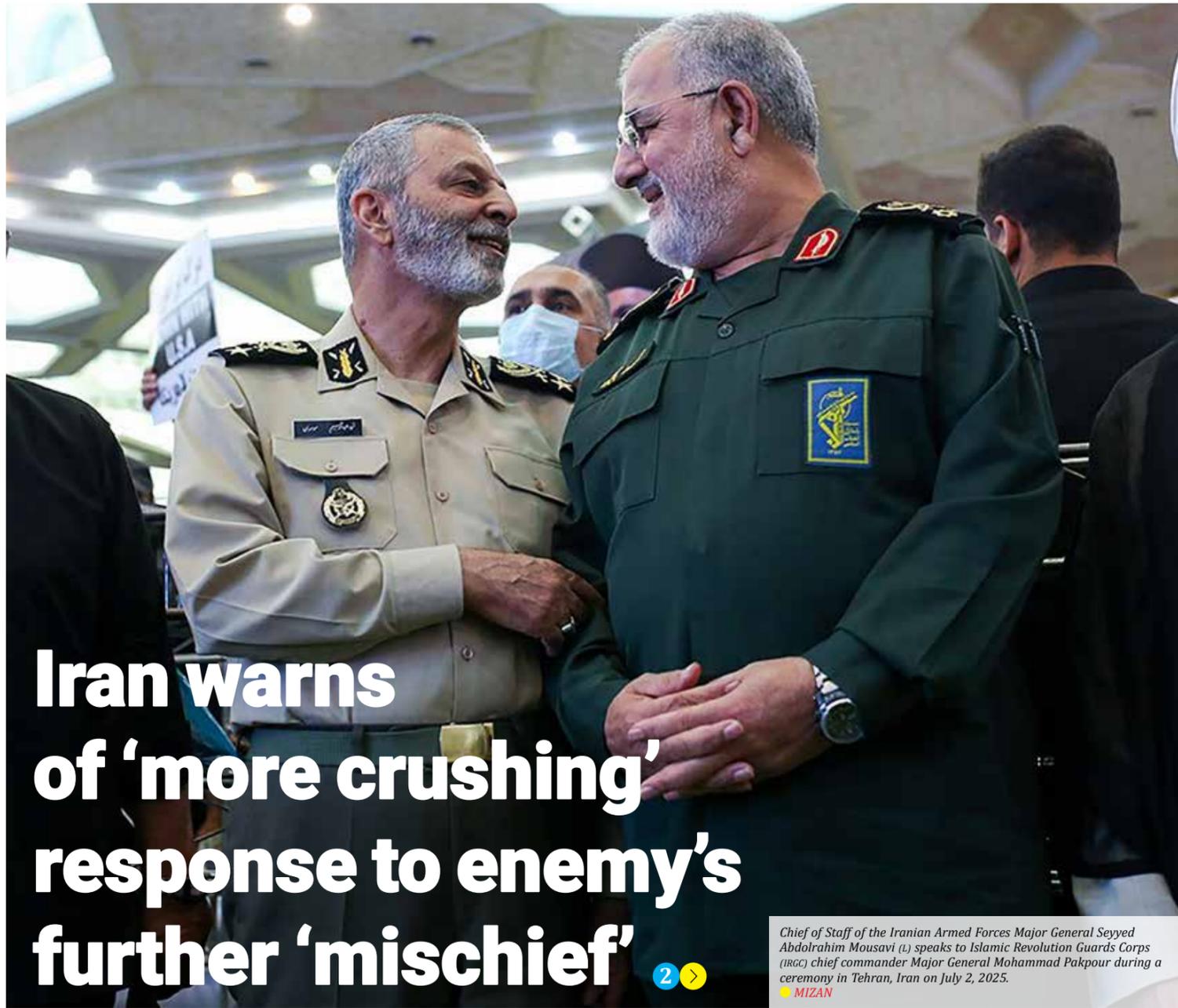
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Iran warns of 'more crushing' response to enemy's further 'mischief'

Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Seyyed Abdolrahim Mousavi (L) speaks to Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) chief commander Major General Mohammad Pakpour during a ceremony in Tehran, Iran on July 2, 2025. **MIZAN**

Iran must raise cost of bad faith for US

Return to war brings no gains for either side

By Mohsen Faezi
Author & researcher

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Events across the region have entered a new and volatile phase since October 7, 2023, in which tensions at nearly every level are proving increasingly difficult to contain. This shift, however, was not simply triggered by Hamas's surprise attack on Israel. Rather, the attack served as a justification to a broader scenario long in the making by Israel. October 7 was, in essence, the opening salvo of a stage Israel had been preparing to launch for some time.

Statements from Israeli officials, as well as documents presented by leaders of Hamas and Hezbollah, have pointed to Tel Aviv's intentions for this new phase. It has been referred to under various labels—ranging from the "Abraham Accords" to a "new Middle East order." In fact, Israel had aimed for this transformation well in advance, and many indicators suggested that its execution was fast approaching.

According to this scenario, the Israeli regime aimed first to weaken resistance forces in Palestine and Lebanon before turning its focus to Iran. Even had the events of October 7 not occurred, it is highly likely that this new phase would have been set in motion regardless.

Now, the contours of this new stage must be examined. Both sides are clearly pushing for significant shifts—especially Israel, which seeks to rewrite the regional equation in its favor. In the current climate, further flare-ups seem inevitable as halting action on one side only opens the door to gains by the other, or invites renewed strikes.

For this reason, assuming that a lasting cease-fire is in place would be misguided. What exists is more of a pause, not a formal truce. No official statements have been released, no terms negotiated, and no discussions held between the parties. The lull has been brokered solely through intermediaries and has temporarily prevented direct attacks, but the overall situation remains highly unstable.

This instability is not limited to the current cease-fire—it has defined the entire post-October 7 period. The Gaza war followed a similar pattern, where mediators such as Qatar and the United States helped secure temporary halts in fighting, but both sides saw these as opportunities to regroup and recalibrate.

Since October 7, Iran has pursued a clear policy: to avoid being drawn into a full-scale regional war. This is based on the understanding that the US and its allies are attempting to reshape the region's balance of power through conflict. Over the past two years, Iran's posture has consistently aimed to de-escalate and prevent the outbreak of wider war—a strategy reaffirmed by the recent 12-day conflict, which showed that regional war runs counter to Iran's interests.



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Pezeschkian enacts law suspending cooperation with IAEA

International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeschkian put into effect on Wednesday a law passed by Parliament to suspend cooperation with the UN nuclear watchdog after last month's strikes by Israel and the US targeted the Islamic Republic's most-important nuclear facilities.

Iran has accused the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of siding with Western countries and providing a justification for Israel's air strikes, which began a day after the IAEA board approved a resolution against Iran on June 12.

Since then, Tehran has also sharply criticized the IAEA for its silence and condemned the resolution put forward by France, Britain and Germany, which accused Iran of non-compliance. According to the law approved by Iran's Parliament, IAEA inspectors will not be permitted to enter Iran unless the security of the country's nuclear facilities and that of peaceful nuclear ac-

tivities is guaranteed, which is subject to the approval of Iran's Supreme National Security Council.

"This suspension will remain in effect until certain conditions are met," Iran's state television said. "We are aware of these reports. The IAEA is awaiting further official information from Iran," the IAEA said in a statement.

Israel launched an unprovoked aggression against Iran on June 13, which targeted residential areas, nuclear facilities and country's military sites. According to Iran's Judiciary, the attacks killed 935 people including civilians, nuclear scientists and the country's top military commanders. The US also joined the aggression by targeting three Iranian nuclear facilities of Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan.

In response, Iran's Armed Forces launched a barrage of missiles at Israel's targets in the occupied territories and the US largest military base in the Middle East in Qatar. Attacks on Israel claimed the lives of 28 settlers.

A cease-fire proposed by the US put an end to the conflict on June 24.

However, a day after the announcement of the cease-fire, Iranian lawmakers voted overwhelmingly to suspend cooperation with the Vienna-based IAEA. While IAEA inspectors have had access to Iran's declared nuclear sites, their status is uncertain amid the suspension.

Inspectors' work suspended

On Sunday, Iran's ambassador to the United Nations, Amir Saeid Irvani, said the inspectors' work had been suspended.

He said the "inspectors are in Iran and are safe," but "their activities have been suspended, and they are not allowed to access our sites."

Iranian lawmaker Alireza Salimi said the inspectors now needed approval from Iran's Supreme National Security Council to access nuclear sites.

Germany's Foreign Ministry spokesman Martin Giese said



Iran's move to suspend cooperation with the IAEA was a "disastrous signal."

Iran has also rejected the IAEA chief's requests to visit bombed sites, accusing him of "malign intent."

US President Donald Trump

claimed that the US attacks had "obliterated" Iran's nuclear program, though the extent of the damage was unclear.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has admitted "serious damage to nuclear sites.

But in a recent interview with

CBS, he said, "One cannot obliterate the technology and science... through bombings."

The aggression occurred while Iran and the US were engaged in diplomatic talks to end a decades-long dispute over Tehran's peaceful nuclear program.

Iran warns of 'more crushing' response to enemy's further 'mischief'

Ceremony held to honor martyrs of Israel's aggression



National Desk

A ceremony was held in the capital Tehran on Wednesday to pay tribute to those killed in a recent aggression by the Israeli regime against the Islamic Republic, with the country's top general warning that Iran's response will be "more crushing" if the enemy does further "mischief."

Heads of the three branches of the government, the country's

military officials, families of the victims of the Israeli aggression and many other officials attended the ceremony which was held to renew allegiance to the martyrs of the onslaught, which claimed the lives of more than 900 Iranians in 12 days.

"Our response will make them regret their actions, and the enemies must understand that any unlawful or threatening move will be met with our firm and decisive reaction," Chief of

Staff of the Armed Forces Major General Seyyed Abdolrahim Mousavi told reporters on the sidelines of the ceremony.

Iranian Judiciary chief Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ejei said the killing of innocent people further revealed the extent of regime's crimes, as well as the US bullying and made the people across the world to come to realize that the US and Israel are not trustworthy at all and cannot be trusted.

Iran's Armed Forces launched a barrage of missiles at Israel's targets in the occupied territories and the US largest military base in the Middle East in Qatar after they attacked Iran in an unprovoked act of aggression.

Iran's attacks on Israel claimed the lives of 28 settlers.

Iran's response came after the Israeli regime launched its aggression against Iran on June 13, which targeted residential

areas, nuclear facilities and country's military sites.

According to the Judiciary, the attacks killed 935 people including civilians, nuclear scientists and the country's top military commanders. The US also joined the aggression by targeting three Iranian nuclear facilities of Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan.

A cease-fire proposed by the US put an end to the conflict on June 24.

Araghchi trashes Europe's 'destructive approach' to nuclear program



Abbas Araghchi



Kaja Kallas

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on Tuesday warned in a phone call with EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas against the "destructive approach" of several European countries toward Iran's nuclear activities. Araghchi also criticized the stance of some European countries over the recent Israel's aggression against Iran, saying it was supportive of Israel and the United States.

Kallas said after the call that "negotiations on ending Iran's nuclear program should restart as soon as possible."

Araghchi denounced what he described as the leniency shown by

some parties toward the lawlessness and crimes of the Zionist regime. He emphasized the responsibility of all governments to condemn the military aggression by Israel and the United States against Iran.

Referring to the open support for the attacks by Germany and some other European governments, Araghchi warned that any statements that implicitly or indirectly justify such blatant violations of international law and the crimes committed by the Israeli regime would be tantamount to complicity in those crimes. The Iranian foreign minister underscored the Iranian nation's firm defense of its territorial integrity and national security in the face of Israeli

and American military aggression. He described the attack on Iran's peaceful nuclear facilities and the killing of Iranian civilians as an unprecedented blow to diplomacy, the non-proliferation regime, and UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

Araghchi said the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran are fully prepared to defend the nation's sovereignty against any form of aggression.

He also reiterated Iran's distrust of the US, stating that, "The Israeli and US military attacks occurred while Iran was engaged in negotiations and diplomacy, and it was the US that betrayed the diplomatic process."

According to a statement by the Iranian Foreign Ministry, Kallas emphasized that there is no evidence suggesting Iran is expanding its nuclear program to develop weapons. She underscored the need for a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear issue and expressed support for ongoing efforts to reduce tensions and promote regional stability.

In a post on social media platform X, the EU's top diplomat said cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency "must resume" and that the bloc is ready to facilitate. "Any threats to pull out of the non-proliferation treaty don't help to lower tensions," she added.

Iran raps Israeli-US aggression as clear violation of int'l law

International Desk

Iran's ambassador and permanent representative to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva rebuked the recent Israeli-US aggression on the country as a blatant violation of the fundamental principles of international law and human rights.

Ali Bahreini made the statement in an address to the 59th session of the UN Human Rights Council during the adoption of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) outcome for the Islamic Republic as he pointed to the brutal onslaught by Israel and the United States on Iranian soil between June 13 and 24.

Stressing that the aggression resulted in the killing of hundreds of Iranian citizens, including dozens of women and children, Bahreini said, "The occupying Israeli regime, with direct support from the US, has illegally targeted civilian infrastructure, medical centers, residential areas, and even Iran's peaceful nuclear facilities in its attacks."

The Iranian envoy described the silence and complicity of some Western countries with the Israeli regime as "a clear norm violation" and emphasized, "The Islamic Republic of Iran does not accept human rights recommendations offered by these countries due to [their] hypocrisy." Referring to Article 51 of the UN Charter on countries' legitimate right to self-defense, Bahreini said, "We will stand against the Zionist regime's aggression and will not wait for any foreign institution or country to defend our people and sovereignty."

He also expressed gratitude to those countries that, based on international principles, issued statements condemning the illegal Israeli-US actions and expressed their sup-



Ali Bahreini

port for Iran.

Bahreini also called on the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to take a clear and explicit stance in condemning the aggression against Iran and demanded accountability from the US and the Israeli regime for threatening global peace and endangering civilian lives.

Israel launched an unprovoked war of aggression against Iran on June 13, assassinating senior military commanders and top nuclear scientists in targeted strikes before attacking nuclear and military sites and residential areas.

The Iranian Armed Forces responded with missile strikes as part of Operation True Promise III, which targeted many strategic sites across the Israeli-occupied territories. Iran's retaliation included the launch of over 500 ballistic missiles and around 1,100 drones at Israel. The attacks killed 28 people and wounded some 5,000 others in the occupied territories.

On June 22, the United States joined the Israeli regime in the assault and bombed three Iranian nuclear sites in a grave violation of the United Nations Charter, international law, and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The 12-day war ended as Israel, having suffered great losses, was forced to accept a unilateral US-brokered cease-fire last week.

Paknejad: Oil exports continue unchanged in quality, quantity

Economy Desk

Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad underlined that the country's oil exports continue as before with no change in quality and quantity.

On the sidelines of the cabinet meeting on Wednesday, Paknejad stated, "We have no concerns in this regard," SHANA reported.

His remarks came a week after the Israeli regime was forced to halt its 12-day aggression against the Islamic Republic as US President Donald Trump showed reluctance in further American involvement in the war.

Meanwhile, China's oil imports from Iran surged in June as shipments accelerated before the Israeli-imposed war against the Islamic Republic and demand from independent refineries improved, according to analysts. The world's top oil importer and biggest buyer of Iranian crude brought in more than 1.8 million barrels per day from June 1-20, as stated by ship-tracker Vortexa, a record high based on the firm's data. Kpler's data put the month-to-



date average of China's Iranian oil and condensate imports at 1.46 million bpd as of June 27, up from one million bpd in May. The rising imports were fueled in part by an increase in available supplies from floating stor-

age after export loadings from Iran reached a multi-year high of 1.83 million bpd in May, Kpler data showed. Robust loadings in May and early June mean China's imports from Iran are poised to remain

elevated, Kpler and Vortexa analysts said. According to Xu Muyu, Kpler's senior analyst, independent Chinese "teapot" refineries, the main buyers of Iranian oil, also showed strong demand as their

stockpiles depleted.

A possible relaxation of US sanctions on Iranian oil could further bolster Chinese buying, she added.

Last Wednesday, Trump signaled a potential easing in en-

forcement to help Iran rebuild; however, he said that Washington had not given up its maximum pressure campaign on the country, including restrictions on Iranian oil sales.

Blowout controllers

Meanwhile, in line with neutralizing sanctions on its oil sector, the Iranian Offshore Oil Company (IOOC), in cooperation with the National Iranian Oil Company, has localized an advanced drilling and well blowout control simulator (Series-5000), Mehr reported.

Ahmadreza Rasti, head of the Iranian Offshore Oil Company, emphasized that the technology of the indigenized marine drilling and blowout control simulator is comparable to foreign models.

"The objectives of launching this simulator are training, enhancing the preparedness of drilling personnel, reducing the need to send personnel to foreign training centers for marine oil and gas well blowout control, and neutralizing sanctions," Rasti was quoted as saying by Mehr news agency.

Plan unveiled to revive war-damaged Iranian industries

Economy Desk

Iran's minister of industry, mine and trade announced the formulation and implementation of the comprehensive "Support for Production" plan to compensate for damages incurred by industries during the 12-day war.

Mohammad Atabak emphasized that the plan, by anticipating insurance, banking, and tax facilities, will pave the way for damaged units to return to the production cycle, ISNA reported.

On Tuesday evening, on the National Industry and Mine Day, during a meeting with owners of damaged industries, Atabak announced the implementation of the special plan aimed at rebuilding and supporting damaged production units.

He described the initiative as a strategic measure to revive the country's industrial capacities.

Referring to the resilience of the industrial sector against the recent aggression, he noted, "The enemy targeted production centers with the aim of halting the production cycle and disrupting people's livelihoods; but with the steadfastness of workers, managers, and industrialists, this conspir-

acy failed, and the bastion of production remains standing."

He further announced the ministry's special plan to support production, stating, "Within the framework of this plan, facilities in the areas of insurance, taxation, working capital, and banking credit have been anticipated for units that suffered damages during the 12-day war. This package is considered an important step for the quick return of these units to the production cycle and the preservation of existing employment."

Atabak, emphasizing the necessity of solidarity in the current situation, stated, "Just as we made the enemy regret its blind aggression through national unity, today, relying on domestic capabilities and the government's practical support, we will forcefully advance the path of repairing damages and rebuilding infrastructure."

The minister of industry, mine and trade concluded by noting, "Supporting industries is not just an economic duty, but part of the national resistance against the enemies of the Iranian nation. The Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade will stand by industrialists until the complete return of damaged units to the production cycle."

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Energy minister affirms solar panel installation in progress nationwide



Economy Desk

Iranian Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi said the ministry is currently installing solar panel equipment at one thousand sites to have more solar power plants across the country.

Aliabadi stated on the sidelines of a weekly government meeting on Wednesday that, "The people are assisting in managing electricity consumption; I witness this, and right now we are consuming less electricity compared to last year. This indicates that the people are helping," ISNA reported. He emphasized that mutual assistance would help the country overcome challenges in the coming two months, resulting in an improved situation.

"Currently, we are installing solar panel equipment at one thousand sites to have more solar power plants across the country," he added.

According to the assessment made by the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (SATBA), "There is a minimum capacity of 1600 MW of small-scale distribut-

ed solar power plants on buildings and parking lots of government offices in the country, which can perform equivalent to 2000 MW concentrated power plants."

Referring to the commitment of executive bodies in developing renewable energies, the deputy of the SATBA, Jafar Mohammadnejad Sigarudi, told ISNA, "Based on a cabinet decree from approximately six years ago, government offices became obligated to supply a percentage of their electricity from renewable sources within four years. However, due to financial resource constraints and the lack of an appropriate mechanism, the implementation of this plan was delayed."

Also, this year, government offices are required to source at least 20% of their electricity from renewable energy. President Masoud Pezeshkian issued a two-month compliance period for government agencies to install solar panels, effective June 21.

Power consumption predicted to reach 77K MW

Simultaneously with the unprece-

dent increase in air temperature in recent days and the likelihood of its continuation in the coming days, electricity consumption is predicted to reach 77,000 megawatts. This is while this level of consumption occurred last year during the peak network load periods.

In line with enforcing consumption warnings, the head of Tavanir, the Iran Power Generation, Transmission and Distribution Management Company Mostafa Rajabi Mashhadi warned that in the coming days, temperatures in many regions of the country will rise above 40 degrees Celsius, and peak consumption is forecast to reach 76,000 to 77,000 megawatts.

"We are striving to keep the peak electricity demand below 74,000 megawatts," Rajabi Mashhadi said. The energy minister, stating that the ministry is focusing on conservation and the development of renewable energies to resolve shortages in the water and electricity industry, said, "One of this ministry's programs is encouraging subscribers to use high-efficiency electrical appliances by adopting self-control mechanisms."

European Troika, Trump's instrumental doctrine

Why did Europe choose disruptive role?

ANALYSIS

Over the past three years, the European Union — especially Germany, France, and the United Kingdom — has gradually fallen in line with the United States, whittling down its own authority and influence on the global stage. This approach has turned these countries into little more than tools or, at best, sidekicks for US policy.

Europe has recently found itself caught up in three interconnected crises: the Iranian nuclear dossier and the conflict imposed on Iran, the war in Ukraine, and the war in Gaza. The way Europe has handled these issues sheds light on whether the EU and its troika have managed to stand up for their credibility and identity in the international system.

Europe letting major games slip away

If the UK, France, and Germany are seen as Europe's representatives in global affairs, their handling of the Iran nuclear file — both generally and in the specific context of the war imposed on Tehran — has been marked by shifting tactics and changing variables. When the Iran nuclear issue was first brought to Europe's attention between 2002 and 2005, these three countries, despite making numerous claims and accusations against Tehran, did not step away from their self-assigned role as mediators. Driven by their stated concerns about nuclear non-proliferation, they went along with Tehran from Sa'dabad to Brussels in pursuit of a deal. Despite frequent clashes with Iran, Europe managed to hold on to a measure of independent international standing during this period.

The second critical phase in Iran-Europe relations, particularly on the nuclear file, dates back to the period of repeated UN resolutions and the referral of Iran's case to the Security Council (2006–2011). During this time, Europe lined up with other powers against Iran and pushed forward the project of Iranophobia.

The third phase of European trio engagement with Iran's nuclear dossier began in 2011 and peaked with the JCPOA agreement. Germany, the UK, and France, alongside the US, Russia, and China, hammered out a deal on Iran's nuclear activities and the lifting of sanctions — described by European governments as one of the world's most significant peace accords. Throughout these years, Europe tried to hold on to its agency regarding Iran's nuclear file and even played a supporting role in sealing the JCPOA. At that juncture, Europe's preference was to go along with Russia and China in advancing the deal with Iran.

Europe's agency reached its zenith after the US withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018 under President Trump. Europe tried not to let Trump use it as a pawn to ramp up pressure on Tehran, and often refused to play even a supporting role. By standing up to Trump, Europe clung to its normative identity. The launch



of channels such as INSTEX, though ultimately ineffective, stood out as a key sign of the European trio's independence — at least in dealing with Iran's nuclear file.

The uneven and tentative relations between Iran and Europe dragged on until February 24, 2022 — the date of Russia's attack on Ukraine. From that point, Europe gradually widened the gap with Iran. Although there was no concrete evidence, accusations that Iran had sent weapons and drones to Russia for use in Ukraine became the main pretext for the European trio to turn their backs on Tehran.

London, Paris, and Berlin, while painting Tehran as an existential threat to their security, ignored repeated Iranian statements that ending conflicts, including the Ukraine war, was its top priority. During this period, Europe fell in line with the US against Iran, but this alignment cannot simply be chalked up as instrumental or even complementary.

Domestic events in Iran in the autumn and winter of 2022 fanned the flames of tension

between Iran and the EU, and attacks on Iranian embassies in European capitals became commonplace. At this stage, Europe's policy toward Iran was cast as a complement to the US strategy. Under the guise of human rights concerns, Europe cooled off its relations with Iran, and this chill has been the defining feature of all subsequent meetings and talks with Iranian officials.

Europe deliberately went along with the cooling of relations with Iran, becoming both a tool and a sidekick for US pressure on Tehran. This conscious choice, however, pushed Europe into a passive stance — one that has become evident in the Iran nuclear file, the Ukraine crisis, and the war in Gaza, especially since Trump's return to the White House in January 2025.

During his second term, Trump did not bother to use Europe as a tool in the following three cases, nor did he even see it as a supporting player. From the outset, Trump cut straight to the chase in the Russia-Ukraine war, sidestepping Europe's concerns and protests to engage directly with

Putin. He took the same shortcut with Iran, writing directly to its top officials. In the Gaza conflict, he personally followed up on the release of Israeli captives.

The fact that all three files remain unresolved and Trump appears somewhat defeated is secondary to Washington's view of Europe and the increased marginalization of the European trio since January 2025. Being shut out of negotiations with Iran, Russia, and Hamas has left Europe wondering if Washington is calling Brussels's global role into question. In response, at least on Iran, Europe pulled out the "snapback mechanism" as a bargaining chip to get both Tehran's and Trump's attention — using it as a tool to pile on the pressure and as a pretext to get on Trump's radar.

During this period, Europe abandoned its normative and value-based stance toward Tehran, sinking into a wholly negative and destructive role, and effectively handed over its independence to Trump. However, subsequent events showed that even this offer was turned down. The reality

is that Trump excluded Europe from both negotiations and the battlefield with Iran. Notably, the European trio's reaction to this exclusion is telling: France claimed to track Iranian drones, while Germany revived rhetoric reminiscent of the Hitler era — all in an effort to cast themselves as tools and sidekicks for US policy, a fact that will surely be etched into the annals of the continent's international relations.

Fallout from Europe's waning agency

Being sidelined from the global order is not a new issue for Europe, especially for its two permanent Security Council members, the UK and France. If this trend continues, Europe will be relegated to a second- or even third-tier player in regional dynamics, at least in West Asia. Relations with Europe in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and the Persian Gulf states have slid down to third or fourth priority, particularly since Europe could not even manage to play the role of a verbal mediator in the Gaza war.

By going along with certain approaches, Europe has, willingly or not, fallen into Trump's instrumental doctrine, becoming a lever to be pulled whenever greater pressure is needed. From the very start of his interaction with Ukraine, the US president showed that cooperation with Europe would only be on the table when it served American interests — not when Europe itself was in trouble.

Ties with the US have deeply affected Europe's identity and value system, making the continent increasingly dependent. To break out of this crisis, Europe needs initiatives beyond calls for restraint and tools other than sanctions and threats. The Iran nuclear issue could break the spell of passivity and, at least for a time, help Europe step out from under Trump's instrumental doctrine and reclaim its original identity.



The article first appeared in Persian on IRNA.



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer (front-L), France's President Emmanuel Macron (front-C), and Germany's Chancellor Friedrich Merz (front-R) arrive at Kyiv railway station on May 10, 2025, ahead of a gathering of European leaders in the Ukrainian capital.

● LUDOVIC MARIN/AFP



Being shut out of negotiations with Iran, Russia, and Hamas has left Europe wondering if Washington is calling Brussels's global role into question. In response, at least on Iran, Europe pulled out the "snapback mechanism" as a bargaining chip to get both Tehran's and Trump's attention — using it as a tool to pile on the pressure and as a pretext to get on Trump's radar.



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer bends to pick up the signed trade agreement that US President Donald Trump (L) dropped in Kananaskis, Canada, on June 16, 2025.

● CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES

Trump's use, misuse of Iran intel



By Paul R. Pillar
Scholar

OPINION

US President Donald Trump has twice, within the space of a week, been at odds with US intelligence agencies on issues involving Iran's nuclear program. In each instance, Trump was pushing his preferred narrative, but the substantive differences in the two cases were in opposite directions. Before the United States joined Israel's attack on Iran, Trump dismissed earlier testimony by Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, in which she presented the intelligence community's judgment that "Iran is not building a nuclear weapon and Supreme Leader Khamenei has not authorized the nuclear weapons program he suspended in 2003." Questioned about this testimony, Trump said, "She's wrong."

Then, after a US air attack that Trump claimed had "completely and fully obliterated" key Iranian nuclear capabilities, press reports about a leaked preliminary assessment by the Defense Intelligence Agency suggested that the US airstrikes instead had probably set back the Iranian program only a few months. The White House pushed back, with Trump himself reaffirming his "total obliteration" language. White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt declared that the reported intelligence assessment was "flat-out wrong."

In the first instance, Trump was accusing US intelligence of under-estimating a supposed threat. In the second instance, he was in effect accusing it of over-estimating what was left of this "threat" after the US attack. The intelligence agencies were not, in the first instance, being dovish Pollyannas before suddenly becoming hawkish alarmists.

Instead, the episodes reflect Trump's attempted spinning of the story into one in which he supposedly confronted a grave threat and, through his bold action, has eliminated it.

The administration has gone into overdrive in endeavoring to discredit any suggestion that the impact of the US airstrikes on the Iranian nuclear program was not momentous and long-lasting. CIA Director John Ratcliffe issued a statement that "a body of credible intelligence indicates Iran's nuclear program has been severely damaged by the recent, targeted strikes." DNI Gabbard asserted on social media that "new intelligence confirms what @PO-TUS has stated numerous times: Iran's nuclear facilities have been destroyed," while Gabbard disparaged the "propaganda media" for reporting on the leaked DIA assessment.

The pushback misses the main issues of whether the airstrikes were wise and what comes next in the confrontation with Iran. Nobody disputes that the US attack inflicted heavy damage. 30,000-pound bombs tend to do that. The Iranian foreign minister has acknowledged "significant and serious damage" to nuclear facilities from the US strikes.

But even severe physical damage does not imply an inability to rebuild and reconstitute a program. Nor does it deny that even with severe damage to targeted facilities, there remain materials and equipment that can be a founda-



tion for reconstitution. The underground enrichment facility at Fordow — the principal target of those 30,000-pound bombs — has received the most attention in the post-attack commentary. That facility is so deep underground that there is good reason to doubt that even multiple bunker-busters could destroy it, although Rafael Grossi, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), assesses that the sensitivity of the enrichment centrifuges to vibration means the centrifuges were probably put out of commission.

At least as important is the high likelihood that Iran, anticipating attacks, had already moved at least some of its enriched uranium to undisclosed locations. This may have included 400 kilograms of uranium enriched to 60 percent that had been at Fordow.

There also remains the scientific and engineering talent that has been involved in a decades-long nuclear program and that is spread across too many people in Iran for even Israel to assassinate. That talent can be applied to the reconstruction of any of the nuclear facilities, including the uranium conversion facility that Secretary of State Marco Rubio highlighted in adding his voice to the administration's message about severe damage to the Iranian program.

Supposed timelines for potential reconstitution of Iran's nuclear program have been thrown into the efforts to spin this story, carelessly and without foundation. Both Ratcliffe and Gabbard spoke of "years" needed for reconstruction. Trump said the Iranian program is "gone for years". Asked whether the United States would

strike Iran again, Trump replied, "I'm not going to have to worry about that," implying no reconstructed Iranian program during the remaining three and a half years of his administration.

It is, as of yet, impossible to make such projections that go much beyond educated guesses, and not only because solidly based projections would require on-scene observations that neither the IAEA nor the United States currently has. The timeline for reconstitution also depends heavily on the priority that the government doing the reconstitution gives to the project and the sacrifices it is willing to make to achieve its objective.

In this regard, one recalls how in the 1970s, prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan declared that Pakistanis would "eat grass, even go hungry" if necessary to acquire a nuclear weapon. Saddam Hussein's Iraq, after Israel bombed an Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981, initiated an accelerated, high-priority clandestine nuclear program that brought Iraq far closer to acquiring a nuclear weapon than it ever was on track to achieve before the Israeli attack.

The administration's spin efforts are especially off-target concerning Iranian intentions. This is the subject on which Trump first blew off a major intelligence community judgment and which determines whether warfare was ever needed in the first place to prevent an Iranian nuclear weapon.

Exaggerating a foreign threat is especially easy to get away with when it is largely a matter of intentions rather than capabilities. An assertion about capabilities might later be disproved by material evidence, whereas proof or

disproof of intentions involves the more difficult question of what is inside foreign leaders' heads.

If no good evidence of an Iranian intention to build nuclear weapons ever surfaces, Trump can claim that it was his decisive action that cowed or dissuaded the Iranians from taking that step. Alternatively, if the Israeli and US attacks lead the Iranians — seeing the need for a stronger deterrent — to build a nuclear weapon, Trump can claim that this was the Iranian intention all along. It will be difficult for the public to sort out what in this story is true and what is false.

The American public has its own preconceptions that aid this kind of administration spinning, including a willingness to assume the worst on anything having to do with Iran. The administration can also exploit basic public ignorance on the subject, as indicated by a poll in 2021 in which 61 percent of respondents mistakenly believed that Iran already possessed nuclear weapons.

The relentless efforts of the Israeli cabinet to depict Iran as a grave threat have played into perceptions held by elites as well as the public. Israel has injected scraps of intelligence into this alarmist campaign, which have involved supposedly "new" revelations that do not go beyond prior knowledge, or that are circumstantial observations that require a chain of worst-case assumptions to connect them to a supposed Iranian decision to build a bomb.

Israel has demonstrated through its offensive operations how extensive its intelligence penetration of Iran is. If the thin gruel it has offered about a supposed

Iranian decision to build a nuclear weapon is the best it can come up with, this thinness is itself evidence that Iran had made no such decision.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been saying for more than three decades that Iran was on the verge of building a nuclear weapon. Although even a broken clock is correct twice each day, to believe what Netanyahu says about Iranian nuclear matters is to disregard how wrong he has been for so long. It also disregards how slanted any Israeli intelligence revelations on this subject are sure to be, given what has been the strong Israeli objective to get the United States involved in a war on Iran.

It is safe to assume that any intelligence Israel offers is a small fraction of what it has collected on the subject, carefully selected to support its effort to drag the United States into war. That is called cherry-picking. Americans should understand this concept, given that 22 years ago they were the targets of a similar tendentious use of intelligence to sell the invasion of Iraq, an episode I have recounted at length elsewhere.

The recent statements by Ratcliffe and Gabbard, intended to sustain Trump's assertions of "obliteration," are another instance of cherry-picking. The statements are not assessments. When Ratcliffe, for example, cites "new intelligence" that "several key Iranian nuclear facilities were destroyed and would have to be rebuilt over the course of years," this says nothing about what has not been destroyed and what the reconstitution potential of the entire Iranian nuclear program is. Trump earlier had been aiming for an agreement with Iran that he could tout as a "better deal" than what Barack Obama had achieved. But now that Netanyahu has sucked him into warfare with Iran, Trump says, "I don't care if I have an agreement or not." He will find it hard to ignore evidence of continued Iranian nuclear capabilities and to brush aside US intelligence assessments on that subject.

Trump will feel pressure to deal with those capabilities, and he will have difficulty sticking to his prediction that he will not have to worry about additional strikes on Iran. The pressure will come especially from the Israeli cabinet, whose objective of having the United States militarily engaged against Iran will continue and whose defense minister, Israel Katz, is talking about an "enforcement policy" involving further attacks against Iran.

Meanwhile, the intelligence task of monitoring what remains of the Iranian nuclear program will be more difficult than ever. There is no substitute for on-site monitoring by international inspectors, especially the intrusive sort provided for in the comprehensive agreement that Iran signed in 2015 and that Trump abandoned three years later. Iran, angry with the IAEA for failing to condemn formally the Israeli and US attacks and suspecting the agency of providing information to Israel that has facilitated Israeli attacks and assassinations, is in no hurry to restore the inspectors' access.

The article first appeared on *Responsible Statecraft*.



Tulsi Gabbard (R) looks at US President Donald Trump, on the day of her swearing-in ceremony as Director of National Intelligence, in the Oval Office at the White House in Washington.

● NATHAN HOWARD/REUTERS



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Israel's former Shin Bet chief Ronen Bar (L), Mossad chief David Barnea (C), and former IDF chief Herzl Halevi talk at an event on May 5, 2024.

● OLIVIER FITOUSSI/HAARETZ

Persepolis parts ways with Turkish coach Kartal

Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League side Persepolis and Ismail Kartal agreed to the mutual termination of the Turkish head coach's contract, club CEO Reza Darvish confirmed on Tuesday.

Kartal had informed the club last week of his intention not to see out his contract, which would have run until June 2026, citing family reasons, though the decision is widely believed to stem from concerns over further conflict between Iran and Israel. Israel launched an aerial aggression on Iranian territory in the early hours of June 13, which led to a 12-day war, before a ceasefire went into effect between the two countries.

The former Fenerbahce manager was appointed to the Reds' job in January, leading the club to eight wins and four draws in 16 games across all competitions.

Persepolis finished third to Tractor and Sepahan

in the Iranian league last season – a lowest finish for the club in nine seasons – while crashing out of the AFC Champions League Elite and the Iranian Hazfi Cup.

Following the below-par campaign, Kartal had promised a shakeup of his aging squad ahead of the new season, with the club making seven summer signings at the behest of the Turkish coach.

There could be further foreign departees from the Reds' squad, as Turkish striker Serdar Dursun, who joined the club in January, and Algerian goalkeeper Alexis Guendouz – signed last summer – are also expected to leave the club in the coming days.

Kartal is the second foreign coach to leave the Iranian top flight in the aftermath of the 12-day war – following Frenchman Patrice Carteron, who stepped down from his role at Sepahan.

Sepahan was quick to replace Carteron by club

legend Moharram Navidkia, who steered the Isfahan-based outfit to a runner-up finish in the league in the 2020/21 season during his first spell at the club.

Rumors are already swirling around Persepolis' vacant managerial position, with some familiar faces being linked to the job in the Iranian media reports in recent days.

Former Persepolis managers Branko Ivankovic and Osmar Loss Viera have reportedly been approached by the club, though both are unlikely to return to the role, while Football360 website wrote on Tuesday that the Reds have also made contact with ex-Iran international Vahid Hashemian.

Karim Baqeri, who served as the interim coach for three games before Kartal's appointment, is expected to take charge of the Reds' preseason training in the coming weeks until a permanent coach is unveiled by the club.



● MARZIEH SOLEIMANI/IRNA

FIVB U19 World Championship:

Iranian boys eyeing glory on return to Tashkent



● volleyball.ir

Sports Desk

Iran will be looking to improve on a runner-up finish in 2023 when the new edition of the FIVB Boys' U19 World Championship gets underway in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on July 21.

Iran will begin its bid for a third world under-19 title against Spain in Pool C of the 24-team tournament on July 24, before taking on Poland – champion in 2021 – the following day.

Adel Gholami's boys will then face double African

tests in Tunisia and Egypt, followed by an encounter against Italy – also a two-time champion – on the final of the pool phase on July 29.

The top four of each of the four groups will progress to the round of 16.

Despite a disrupted preparation process in recent weeks, Gholami will still hope to see his talented squad deliver when they chase glory on return to the Uzbek capital.

The Iranian boys had been stranded in Tashkent for over two weeks following a CAVA U19 title-winning

campaign – due to the closure of Iranian airspace during the 12-day war with Israel – before finally returning home late on Tuesday.

Outside-hitter Mohammad-Amin Rahimi, middle-blocker Mohammad-nima Bateni, and libero Mohammad-Amin Arab-yarmohammadi will be the players to watch in the Iranian team after being named in the dream team of the Asian U18 Championship last year, while Mahdi Sakhavi, Arshia Sa'adat, Parsa Galehdar, and Amirmohammad Ra-

fieirad among the best in the CAVA under-19 event, with the latter claiming the MVP award of the tournament.

Elsewhere in Tashkent, the host country is joined by Belgium, Argentina, Puerto Rico, Pakistan, and Turkey in Pool A.

Defending champion France headlines Pool B – also featuring Bulgaria, Japan, China, Algeria, and Canada – with six-time champion Brazil, the United States, South Korea, Colombia, Finland, and Cuba completing the lineup in Pool D.

Iran names squad for FIBA Women's Asia Cup Division B

Sports Desk

Greek head coach named Iran's 12-woman squad for the upcoming FIBA Women's Asia Cup Division B

– starting July 13 in Shenzhen, China.

Negin Rasoulipour, Faezeh Shahriari, Kimia Yazdan Tehrani, Sheida Shojaei, Delaram Vakili, Farnaz

Khodamardi, Mahla Abedi, Mahsa Karani, Ghazal Zamani, Aida Golmohammadi, Nahideh Asadi, and Roxy Barahman will represent the country at the eight-day

tournament. Iranian girls will kick off their campaign in the Cook Islands in Group B on the first day of the competition, before facing Mongolia on July 15.

The final day of the group stage will see Iran take on Thailand on July 16.

The Chinese Taipei, Kazakhstan, India, and Tahiti are in Group A. The two group winners will progress to semifinals, while the second- and third-placed teams in each group will play in a playoff round for a last-four spot.

The Division B champion will qualify for next edition's Division A event.

Iran secured a place in the Division B finals after beating Syria (65-55) and Jordan (88-70) in April's West Asian qualification tournament in Amman.



● MNA

FIFA Club World Cup:

Mbappe edging closer to full fitness as Real reach last eight

REUTERS – Real Madrid coach Xabi Alonso said Kylian Mbappe was edging closer to full fitness ahead of the Club World Cup quarter-finals after his side eliminated Juventus 1-0 in the last 16 on Tuesday.

Mbappe made his long-awaited debut in the tournament as a second-half substitute following a bout of gastroenteritis that sidelined him during the group stage.

Alonso expressed optimism that the France striker would be sharper in time for Saturday's quarter-final clash against Borussia Dortmund.

"I think day by day he will get better, and by the time of the quarters he should be in



● HANNAH MCKAY/REUTERS

much better shape," Alonso told a press conference. "We'll keep checking in with him every day."

In Mbappe's absence, Gonzalo Garcia deputised brilliantly, scoring the only goal on Tuesday for his third of the tournament.

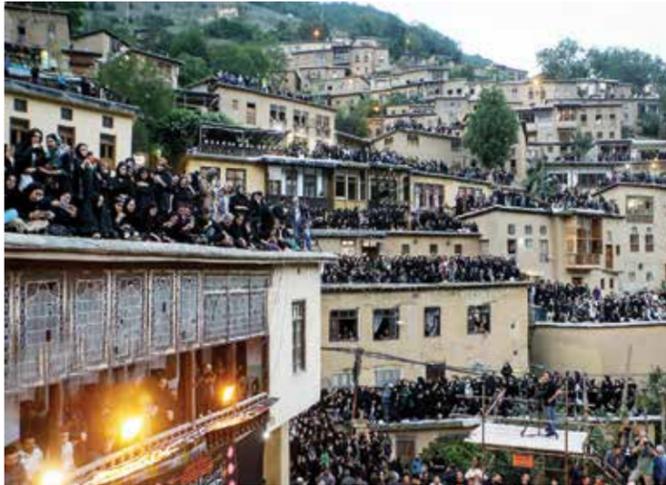
Midfielder Federico Valverde was instrumental in Madrid's hard-fought win, creating countless chances and earning praise from Alonso, who hailed the Uruguayan as a "complete player" with leadership qualities that lift the entire team.

Significance of Masuleh's Alam Bandi ritual as a religious heritage

Iranica Desk

The lunar month of Muharram is one of the most sacred and revered periods in the Islamic calendar. It serves as a time for reflection, remembrance, and deep reverence for Imam Hussein (PBUH) and his companions' martyrdom at Karbala. Ashura, the tenth day of Muharram, holds immense significance as it commemorates the day when Imam Hussein (PBUH) and his followers sacrificed their lives fighting against tyranny, injustice, and oppression. This day stands not only as a symbol of sacrifice and martyrdom but also as a powerful reminder of resistance, steadfastness, and the ongoing struggle for justice. Throughout this sacred month, mourning rituals and ceremonies are performed across the Muslim world, expressing love and devotion to Ahl al-Bayt (PBUH), the family of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and highlighting the importance of upholding Islamic values, standing against oppression, and promoting moral integrity. These observances serve to keep alive the legacy of Imam Hussein (PBUH) and the spirit of Ashura, inspiring generations anew, chn.ir wrote.

One unique tradition associated with Muharram, particularly in Masuleh, Gilan Province, is the Alam Bandi Ritual — literally meaning "flag rising." This ritual has garnered international recognition and attracts a large number of religious pilgrims from across Iran and around the world every year. The event, which is of-



ficially registered on Iran's National Heritage List, takes place annually at sunset on the sixth day of Muharram. During this ceremony, residents of this historic city, many of whom reside in other parts of Iran and even abroad, return to their ancestral hometowns specifically to participate in this revered ritual, honoring the

customs of their ancestors. The ceremony begins with mourners, adhering to an old custom, rubbing cymbals against each other atop rooftops and courtyards of neighborhood mosques while blowing traditional trumpets. This melodious sound echoes throughout the streets of Masuleh, drawing the residents and

mourners from all four neighborhoods of the city toward the mosques. The melody's resonance awakens a collective consciousness of the event's start, prompting communities to gather at their respective neighborhood mosques. This religious ceremony is centered at the shrine of Imamzadeh Aun ibn Ali



IRNA

(PBUH). Initially, residents from the four neighborhoods transfer their Alams — draped in green cloth and decorated with symbolic motifs related to Ashura — to the shrine. These Alam are then blessed and prepared by trustees representing each district. Following this, the mourning groups participate in the

rites, receiving their Alams before returning to their neighborhoods to continue the mourning process. A distinctive feature of this ritual is the Alam used during the ceremony. Unlike typical Alams, this one is uniquely shaped vertically. It is believed that, owing to the distinctive architecture and tiered rooftops of

Masuleh's houses, the Alam was intentionally designed in this form, reflecting the village's characteristic style and cultural heritage.

It is noteworthy that most houses in Masuleh open their doors to offer donations during these days. The local inhabitants serve traditional refreshments such as cinnamon tea, hot milk, and sweets cherished in the region. Additionally, sheep are sacrificed as offerings for mourners, in accordance with traditional customs. One of the remarkable aspects of this ceremony is its purity from superstitions; it continues to be held annually with deep respect and devotion, preserving its original traditions and significance.

Imamzadeh Aun ibn Ali (PBUH) rose after the uprising of Mukhtar to seek revenge for Imam Hussein's (PBUH) martyrdom at Ashura.

The Alams and banners used in the ceremonies remain in the mosques of the four neighborhoods until the end of the month of Safar. Until the day of Tasu'a, the banners are dressed in green, symbolizing ongoing mourning and hope. On Ashura, however, these green garments are removed, and the Alams are dressed in black, signifying mourning and grief.

Most Muharram rituals in Gilan Province attract large crowds of visitors from all over Iran and around the world. These events stand among the most revered and colorful expressions of Islamic mourning, deeply enriching the cultural and spiritual fabric of the region.

Improving infrastructure in Kalat to boost tourism

Iranica Desk

Kalat is considered one of Iran's border cities, situated in the northeastern part of Khorasan Razavi Province. The name Kalat translates to fortress, rampart, or citadel. Its historical significance dates back to the Afsharid era and the reign of Nader Shah, which is why it is also renowned as Kalat Naderi. In history, Kalat was known as a storage place for valuable jewels and spoils. Notably, the city was attacked 14 times by Timur Lang, yet he was never able to conquer it. Nestled among the heights of the Hezar Masjid Mountains, Kalat is famed as the land of impenetrable fortresses,

with the rugged mountains serving as a natural barrier that provides formidable protection. The terrain results in a cold climate, and visitors can enjoy fresh, pollution-free air during their trips. Winters here tend to be quite cold. Kalat continues to hold its strategic importance and rich historical significance. Its unique landscape and depth of history make it a compelling destination for travelers interested in natural beauty and cultural heritage. Recently, the governor of Kalat, in an interview with ISNA, described the city as the "jewel of eastern Iran's natural history" and emphasized that Kalat is now

poised for a significant leap forward in the tourism sector. Abulfath Lashgari highlighted that this region has long been celebrated as one of the most beautiful spots of Khorasan Razavi Province, attracting enthusiasts of nature and history alike, according to ISNA. He noted that millions of visitors come annually to explore attractions such as the Khorshid Mansion and other historical sites. Currently, there are around 150 ecolodges operating within the county, serving tourists and visitors. While accommodation options have improved compared to the past, the governor acknowledged that, given the large

influx of tourists, there is still room for further development. Lashgari stressed the urgent need to develop tourism infrastructure and facilities. He emphasized the importance of investment in the hospitality sector and noted that recent meetings with over 30 investors aim to facilitate this progress. Significant steps have already been taken, including initiatives to improve tourism infrastructure, enhance drinking water supplies, and install stairs in the Qarasu neighborhood — all aimed at increasing tourist satisfaction. He also discussed efforts to regulate unofficial lodging establishments, stating that

all such places must obtain the necessary permits. Issuing permits in Kalat is not an obstacle, and the priority remains on enhancing tourism services and facilities. Lashgari encouraged young villagers and female household heads interested in ecotourism activities to benefit from accessible facilities, as this can create employment opportunities and increase income in rural areas. Referring to the region's many natural and historical attractions, Lashgari highlighted five perennial rivers, three large springs, several historical sites, and three major dams, which draw many tourists throughout the year.

He pointed out that the city's roads, currently in suboptimal condition, need upgrading. Thanks to efforts by the city's representative in Parliament, construction has begun to upgrade the Mashhad-Kalat highway, which will include additional lanes. This project is expected to take seven years and aims to facilitate tourist travel while reducing traffic accidents. He further noted that Kalat's unique historical and natural features have turned it into a popular destination for travelers. The villages, with their rich culture, warm hospitality, and pristine landscapes, can offer visitors unforgettable experiences. These attributes will help position

Kalat as a preferred destination for both domestic and international tourists.

Emphasizing that developing tourism will benefit the local economy and aid in the preservation of cultural traditions, Lashgari said that with active community participation and the creation of new employment opportunities, sustainable development and conservation of natural and cultural resources are achievable.

He finalized by stating that with its vast potentials, Kalat could soon rank among Iran's leading tourist destinations, contributing significantly to the region's economic and cultural prosperity.



Iran urges UNESCO to protect historical sites from Israeli aggression

The Iranian minister of cultural heritage, tourism and handicrafts said the UNESCO director general has warned Israel against targeting Iran's cultural and natural heritage sites. Reza Salehi Amiri made the remark in an interview with Iran's official news agency (IRNA) on Wednesday, after Iran requested UNESCO's support in protecting its invaluable historical and cultural heritage sites from potential damage due to Israeli attacks. He said Iran has officially sent a letter to UNESCO Director General Audrey Azoulay, calling for urgent and effective action by the international body to safeguard its cultural and natural heritage from threats posed by Israeli military actions, Press TV reported. In the letter, Salehi Amiri has highlighted the responsibility of UNESCO and the international community to preserve irreplaceable global treasures,

citing the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, as well as the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage to prevent damage to Iran's invaluable historical and natural sites, he said. Iran, the minister said, has more than 40,000 nationally registered monuments and 28 World Heritage Sites, including more than 100 historical, natural, and cultural sites. More than 50 other monuments are also on UNESCO's tentative list for World Heritage registration. Iran also warned that delays in UNESCO's response could lead to irreversible damage to its World Heritage sites, stressing that many of these monuments are under direct and indirect threat. "We are aware that the Director-Gener-

al of UNESCO has conveyed this issue as a warning to the Zionist regime," Salehi Amiri said when asked about UNESCO's action regarding Iran's letter and the necessity of protecting Iran's historical and cultural monuments. On June 13, the Israeli regime launched unlawful aggression against Iran, leading to the assassination of many senior commanders, nuclear scientists, and ordinary citizens. Iran retaliated in less than 24 hours with a barrage of missiles and drones, and followed it up with a series of retaliatory operations under True Promise III. The US entered the war on behalf of Israel on June 22, when its bombers hit three Iranian nuclear sites in brazen violation of international law. In response, Iran launched a missile strike on Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar, the largest US military air base in West



Asia, as an act of retaliation. After 12 days, during which the Iranian armed forces inflicted heavy blows on the regime and its military and industrial infrastructure, the Israeli regime was forced to accept a truce deal.

Iran expedites Afghan deportations in spy hunt after Israel aggression

Nearly half a million illegal migrants expatriated



Afghans stand on a queue after arriving at the zero point of the Islam Qala border crossing between Afghanistan and Iran on June 28, 2025, following their deportation from Iran. AFP

Social Desk

Iran has stepped up deportations of undocumented Afghan nationals in recent weeks, citing national security threats and espionage ties with Israel, senior officials said Tuesday. Since March 20, over 400,000 illegal Afghan migrants have been sent back to Afghanistan, according to Nader Yar-Ahmadi, head of Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrant Affairs (BAFIA) at Iran's Interior Ministry. He said the removals have accelerated

following Iran's 12-day military war with Israel, after which Iranian intelligence flagged concerns over "infiltrators" linked to Mossad. "Some of those who entered in recent years were not just migrants," Iran's Interior Minister Eskandar Momeni said on state TV on June 28. "They had clear sabotage goals." Without giving specifics, he claimed some Afghan nationals were sent into Iran to disrupt national security during the conflict. The push to expel migrants comes

amid growing pressure from the public. Iranian officials have emphasized the removals are a "popular demand," especially in border provinces where the economic burden of hosting refugees runs high. Authorities say more than 75% of the returnees have left voluntarily through official crossings like Dogharoun in Khorasan Razavi Province, while others were forcibly deported after being apprehended. The border town of Taybad, with its strategic crossing into Afghanistan, has become a key departure point.

"The entire process, from detection to removal, is being coordinated," Yar-Ahmadi said during a visit to Dogharoun on July 1. "We've ensured all infrastructure is in place for a dignified return." Over 400,000 illegal migrants were deported since March 20, Momeni said Wednesday, stressing that immigration reform is now a "top legislative priority." A long-delayed National Migration Organization bill is currently awaiting parliamentary approval. "The job can't be piecemeal," he added. "From visa issuance to employment supervision, it must be handled

start to finish by one agency." Judicial authorities have echoed the urgency. Prosecutor-General Mohammad Movahedi-Azad warned on June 28 that unauthorized residents, "especially Afghans," must leave "without delay," or face legal action. "Those deceived by Zionist schemes must turn themselves in," he added, hinting at suspected recruitment operations by foreign intelligence services. Following the war, Iranian military commanders issued strict orders to cut off logistical support for Afghan nationals. "Any lease to an Afghan is void," Border Guard Commander Ahmad-Ali Goudarzi said last week. "Properties will be sealed and seized." The policy, he claimed, is "backed by overwhelming public support." Officials insist the measure is necessary. "We have hosted Afghans for over 40 years," said one senior border official. "But national security comes first." Despite mounting global criticism, Iran has vowed to press ahead. "We'll continue deportations in line with the law," Momeni said. "We can no longer carry the burden alone."

13 protected zones damaged as war hits Iran's natural heritage

Social Desk

Iran's Department of Environment said on Wednesday that the recent 12-day war caused "irreparable damage" to the country's natural reserves, burning thousands of hectares of forest and displacing wildlife across at least 13 protected zones. The losses, the department said in a statement, span nine provinces including Fars, Ilam, Kermanshah, Isfahan, Khuzestan, Lorestan, Hamedan, Gilan and Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, ILNA reported. Iran boasts one of the richest biodiversities in the region, home to 8,660 species of plants—around one-third of them endemic—as well as some 35,000 species of invertebrates and 2,362 vertebrate species. The country contains nine of the world's 11 major ecosystems and hosts 41 out of 42 recognized types of wetlands globally. Close to 20% of Iran's land—comprising 327 classified reserves, 211 no-hunting zones, 13 biosphere sites, and 226 wetlands—is managed under

national environmental protection mandates. "Nearly 9,000 hectares of forest and rangeland were scorched by fragments of war projectiles," the department said, adding that fires wiped out plant cover, damaged soil layers and killed multiple animal species. A ranger station was destroyed and several other facilities were also hit. The conflict forced widespread wildlife migration and led to a spike in road-kill, hunger and poaching. Experts warn the war also disrupted food chains and ecosystem services, with knock-on effects yet to be measured. To tackle the crisis, a special task force titled Emergency Biodiversity Management Committee has been formed. The department has sent new biodiversity protection guidelines to provincial offices and begun compiling field reports to assess the full extent of the damage. The department pledged to submit a "comprehensive" damage report to relevant international bodies in the coming weeks.

Iran must raise ...

A review of Iran's regional policy over the years reveals a deliberate avoidance of direct confrontation with the Israeli regime. Instead, Tehran's strategy has centered on leveraging internal dynamics within the occupied territories, supporting Palestinian resistance, and bolstering allied forces in the region. Based on this approach, the current situation demands two things: first, that direct confrontation be halted; and second,

that resistance movements like Hamas and Hezbollah be allowed the space and time to recover. At this stage, both sides are weighing the cost of reigniting direct conflict. This does not necessarily mean they will return to the battlefield. Israel has struck some targets in Iran, including nuclear sites, with the US involvement, and has achieved part of its goals. In response, Iran has delivered heavy retaliatory blows to Israeli military sites.

In parallel with military action, Israel has pursued a second objective: fomenting unrest inside Iran in hopes of exploiting internal divisions or even setting the stage for regime change via a "Plan B." However, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu himself has acknowledged that military aggression will not bring about such a change. Israeli leaders now appear to believe that prolonging the war would ultimately backfire, shifting the balance in Iran's favor. This realization casts serious

doubt on their willingness to reignite conflict—unless, perhaps, they succeed in reshaping the playing field through the Plan B. All things considered, renewed direct warfare would offer little strategic gain for either party. Turning to the issue of negotiations with the United States, several critical points emerge. First, a premature return to the negotiating table—particularly without prerequisites—could send the wrong signal. It may create the impression that Iran

is acting out of weakness, emboldening Washington to fall back on secondary plans and assume it has leverage. Given the breakdowns in previous rounds of talks, rushing back into dialogue would be ill-advised. Iran must learn from those experiences and raise the cost of bad faith and broken commitments. Simply put, the price for walking away from the table must rise. Therefore, any return to talks should be delayed or preceded by firm preconditions. One

potential move could involve suspending cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), sending a clear message that any deal-breaking will not come cheap. Iran must act in a way that, even if it does return to negotiations, makes any future withdrawal by the other party a costly miscalculation. Accordingly, no signal should be sent that Iran is always ready at the negotiating table, allowing the other side to walk away whenever they please.