

Pezeshkian urges
'pathological evaluation'
of security woes after
12-day war

2 >



Role of the Druze in advancing Israeli agenda in Syria

By Alireza Majidi
Middle East affairs analyst

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Rising tensions between the Druze community in Suwayda and the Syrian government led by Ahmad al-Sharaa have opened a window for Israel to step in with military backing for this religious minority to advance its political strategy in Syria.

The Druze, an Islamic-rooted religious minority, comprise around 3% of Syria's population, with most residing in the southern province of Sweida. This region's location near the Jordanian border and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights has elevated its geopolitical value in recent years.

With ethnic and religious ties to Israel's own Druze population, their presence provides Israel with a strategic foothold. Supporting Muslim minorities in neighboring countries has become one of Tel Aviv's tools for projecting influence in the region, enabling them to act as proxies or representatives of Israeli interests abroad.

What makes the Druze especially valuable in this regard is their relatively successful integration into Israeli society. Unlike many other Arab groups who remained in their homeland after the 1948 establishment of Israel, segments of the Druze community have carved out a more accepted role within Israeli society—at least in the eyes of the Zionist regime.

This perceived assimilation has made them a focal point of Israel's political and military investments in Syria.

Page 2 >

Leader: Iran not to enter any arena as weak but with full strength

2 >



Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei addresses senior judiciary officials during a meeting in Tehran on July 16, 2025.

Leader.ir

Israel bombs Syria army HQ following deadly clashes in south

International Desk

The Israeli regime launched Wednesday rare airstrikes in the heart of Damascus, hitting the Syrian Defense Ministry headquarters following deadly clashes in the southern Syrian city of Sweida, which have killed more than 300 people. Israel's attack came hours after a drone strike on the same building. Syrian state media reported at least 13 people wounded. Another strike hit near the presidential palace in the hills outside of Damascus.

As clashes have raged for days in the southern Syrian city of Sweida between government forces and Druze armed groups. Israel has launched dozens of strikes targeting government troops and convoys, which it claims are in support of the religious minority group, and has vowed to escalate its involvement. The escalating violence appears to be the most serious threat yet to the ability of Syria's new rulers to consolidate control of the country after a rebel offensive led by insurgent groups ousted longtime leader, Bashar Assad, in December.

Israeli minister of military affairs, Israel Katz, said after the airstrike in a post on X that the "painful blows have begun." An Israeli military official who spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations said the occupation army was preparing for a "multitude of scenarios" and that a brigade, normally comprising thousands of soldiers, was being pulled out of Gaza and sent to the Golan Heights.

Over 300 killed in Sweida

The so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) claimed that since clashes erupted on Sunday, 69 Druze fighters were killed as well as 40 civilians,

27 of whom in "summary executions... by members of the defense and interior ministries", while 165 government forces and 18 Bedouin fighters were also killed, along with 10 members of the government's security forces in Israeli strikes. Syrian government forces on Tuesday entered the majority-Druze city of Sweida, with the stated aim of overseeing a cease-fire agreed with Druze community leaders after clashes with local Bedouin tribes left dozens dead.

However, witnesses reported that the government forces joined with the Bedouin in attacking Druze fighters and civilians in a bloody rampage through the city.

The fighting marks the most serious outbreak of violence in Syria since government forces battled Druze fighters in Sweida Province and near Damascus in April and May, leaving more than 100 people dead.

Israel has portrayed itself as a defender of the Druze, although some analysts say that is a pretext for pursuing its own military goal of keeping Syrian government forces as far from the border as possible.

Page 2 >



The picture shows a view of the damage following Israeli strikes on the Syrian Defense Ministry headquarters in Damascus on July 16, 2025.

LOUAI BESHARA/AFP



VP stresses foreign investment security as 'overarching, unalterable policy

3 >



From sanctioning of Francesca Albanese to US's violations of int'l law

Is it time to move UN headquarters?

PERSPECTIVE 4-5 >



Iran among world's top 20 tourist destinations

8 >

Leader: Iran not to enter any arena as weak but with full strength



Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei speaks during a meeting with senior judiciary officials in Tehran on July 16, 2025.
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National Desk

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said on Wednesday that Iran will never step in any arena as the weaker side – whether in the field of diplomacy or the military. “Both friends and foes should take note that the Iranian nation will never enter in any arena as the weaker side. We have all necessary tools, including logic and military strength. Therefore, whether in the field of diplomacy or the military, whenever we step in, we will enter with full strength,” Ayatollah Khamenei said in a meeting with Iran’s Judiciary officials in Tehran. He was referring to Iran’s recent response to the last month’s Israel and the US aggression

against Iran and Tehran’s insistence on its rights during negotiations on its peaceful nuclear program. On June 13, Israel launched an unprovoked aggression against Iran, assassinating many high-ranking military commanders, nuclear scientists, and ordinary civilians. More than a week later, the US entered the war by bombing three Iranian nuclear sites. In response, the Iranian Armed Forces targeted strategic sites across the occupied territories as well as the Al-Udeid air base in Qatar, the largest American military base in West Asia. On June 24, the Israeli regime, isolated and abandoned, declared a unilateral halt to its aggression, announced on its behalf by US President Donald

Trump. The Leader cited Israel’s desperate appeal to the United States for a cease-fire after 12 days of aggression as clear evidence of Iran’s strong and decisive response to the regime. “If the Zionist regime had not bowed down and clung to the ground, and if it were capable of defending itself, it would not have turned to America like that. But it understood that it could not stand against the Islamic Republic.” He said the confrontation revealed not only Iran’s military and strategic strength, but also the resilience, awareness, and national unity of the Iranian people. The Leader described Iran’s retaliatory strike against the US attack as a highly sensitive one.

“The target hit by Iran was an extremely sensitive American center in the region, and once media censorship is lifted, it will become clear what a significant blow Iran delivered. Of course, even greater strikes could be dealt to the US and others if necessary.” Ayatollah Khamenei stated that the enemy’s strategy was to weaken Iran through targeted assassinations and psychological operations, then mobilize internal saboteurs and agitators to trigger unrest, but it was fully defeated by public awareness and nationwide solidarity. “In reality, the exact opposite of the enemy’s plan occurred, revealing that many of the assumptions held by some individuals in political and related spheres were also incorrect.”

Parliament rules out resumption of US talks until preconditions met

International Desk

Iran’s Parliament said in a statement on Wednesday that the country should not resume nuclear negotiations with the United States until preconditions are met. “When the US use negotiations as a tool to deceive Iran and cover up a sudden military attack by the Zionist regime (Israel), talks cannot be conducted as before. Preconditions must be set and no new negotiations can take place until they are fully met,” the statement said. The statement did not define the preconditions, but Iran’s Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has previously said there should be guarantees there will be no further attacks against Tehran. Israel and the US launched strikes on Iran’s nuclear facilities last month, claiming that they were part of a program geared towards developing nuclear weapons. Tehran maintains that its nuclear program is purely for civilian purposes. Tehran and Washington had held five rounds of indirect negotiations mediated by Oman prior to the 12-day air war, with US demands that Tehran drop its domestic uranium enrichment program reaching a dead end. Last week, Araghchi reiterated Tehran’s position that it would not agree to a nuclear deal that prevents it from enriching uranium



and would refuse to discuss extra-nuclear topics such as its ballistic missile program. US President Donald Trump said on Tuesday he was in no rush to negotiate with Iran as its nuclear sites were now “obliterated”, but the US, in coordination with three European countries, has agreed to set the end of August as the deadline for a deal. French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said on Tuesday that Paris, London and Berlin would trigger the United Nations sanctions snapback mechanism, which would reimpose international sanctions on Iran, by the end of August if there is no concrete progress regarding an agreement. “The threat to use the snapback mechanism lacks legal and political basis and will be met with an appropriate and proportionate

response from the Islamic Republic of Iran,” Iran’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baqaei told a press conference on Monday. “The European parties, who are constantly trying to use this possibility as a tool, have themselves committed gross and fundamental violations of their obligations under the JCPOA (2015 Iran nuclear deal),” Baqaei said. “They have failed to fulfill the duties they had undertaken under the JCPOA, so they have no legal or moral standing to resort to this mechanism.” The US withdrew from the deal in 2018 (known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) and the European parties to the deal failed to fulfil their commitments under the deal. In response, the Islamic Republic began to scale back its JCPOA commitments.

Pezeshkian urges ‘pathological evaluation’ of security woes after 12-day war

National Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Wednesday a recent Israeli aggression against Iran revealed “fundamental problems” in the country’s security field, necessitating a pathological evaluation in this regard. “In the recent war, it became clear that we had fundamental problems in security matters. A pathological evaluation must be carried out in this regard to minimize the damage to our country in such cases,” Pezeshkian said in a cabinet meeting. On June 13, Israel launched an unprovoked war against Iran, assassinating many high-ranking military command-



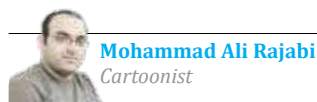
ers, nuclear scientists, and ordinary civilians. More than a week later, the United States also entered the war by bombing three Iranian nuclear sites in a grave violation of the United Nations Charter, international law, and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Israel bombs Syria ...

Iran condemns Israel’s attacks

Earlier on Tuesday, Iran expressed deep concern over the recent clashes in Syria and condemned the Israeli attacks on the Arab country. Iranian Foreign Ministry’s spokesman Esmail Baqaei pointed to the continued military aggression by Israel against Syria’s territorial integrity, coinciding with the ongoing occupation of a large part of Syrian territory. He described the continued inaction of the United Nations Security Council regarding the aggressive actions of the regime against regional countries as ‘extremely dangerous’ and as fueling the

escalating boldness of the occupying regime. Turkey on Wednesday condemned the Israel’s strikes, saying they sought to undermine stability in the war-torn country. “Israel’s attacks on Damascus, following its military interventions in the south of Syria, constitute an act of sabotage against Syria’s efforts to secure peace, stability, and security,” the foreign ministry said in a statement. The United States’ special envoy for Syria on Wednesday called on all parties to step back and engage in dialogue for a lasting cease-fire in Syria following clashes with Druze factions in the south and Israeli strikes in Damascus.



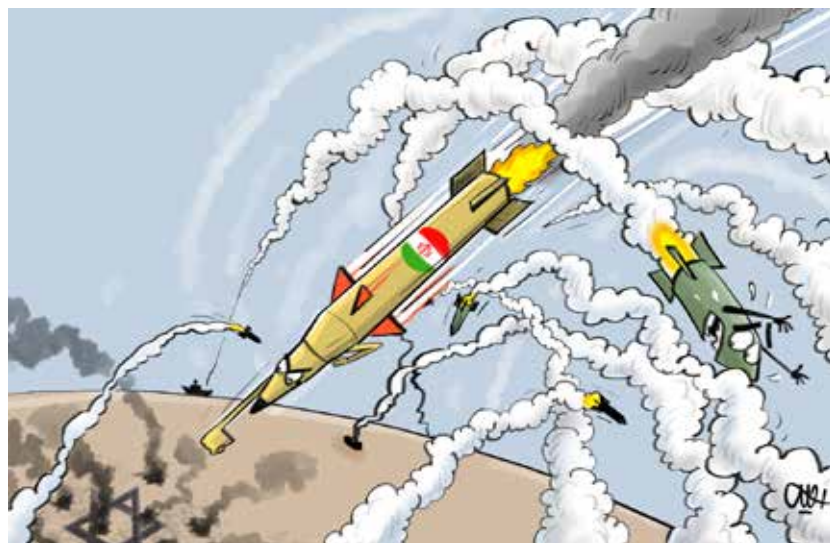
Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

Role of the Druze ...

This policy of minority engagement was clearly articulated by Gideon Sa’ar during his first press conference as Israel’s foreign minister, where he specifically named the Kurds and Druze as minorities of interest to Israel in the region. Currently, as skepticism within Israeli circles grows toward the continued presence of Sharaa in Syria, the Druze are being viewed as a potential balancing force. The Zionist regime has heavily counted on the Druze to counterbalance Damascus’s influence and support them as a strategic asset—or even a “trump card”—in Syria’s power struggles. Tensions in Sweida erupted just as

negotiations between Syria’s interim government and the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) collapsed. The breakdown came after SDF leaders issued a strongly worded statement criticizing the interim authorities in Damascus. These developments unfolded concurrently with violent clashes in Sweida. Given the already strained relations between the Sharaa-led government and the Druze, Damascus responded by deploying large numbers of military forces—mainly Sunni troops—from northern and central Syria as well as from Daraa in the south. These deployments appeared aimed at settling scores with the Druze, marking the first such large-scale

military movement toward Sweida since Sharaa assumed control of Damascus eight months ago. Until now, Sweida had largely managed its own affairs without major interference from the central government. Against this volatile backdrop, Israel launched limited but symbolic airstrikes in recent days against Damascus-aligned forces. Though the strikes were not militarily decisive, they were intended as a clear warning: Israel may escalate its involvement if the Druze are seriously threatened. Taken together, these developments suggest that the Druze will likely play an increasingly role in shaping Syria’s future political landscape.



Directive for facilitating Iran’s digital economy businesses approved

President calls for new solutions to digital economy problems

Economy Desk

The directive by the Committee for Facilitating the Activities of Digital Economy Businesses was approved during a meeting of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace chaired by Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian. The president emphasized the preparation of new and serious solutions to address problems in the digital economy sector, stating, "It is necessary to assess the extent to which the objectives outlined for the cyberspace domain have been achieved." At the meeting, Pezeshkian highlighted the council's crucial responsibilities and duties in enhancing service quality within this domain and addressing security concerns, particularly under current sensitive conditions. He called for a precise evaluation of the achievement level of set objectives in this domain and for identifying existing obstacles and challenges to resolve them. Pezeshkian and members of the Su-

preme Council of Cyberspace also emphasized the vigorous pursuit of realizing the National Information Network. Pezeshkian highlighted the importance of strengthening the country's infrastructure and enhancing its resilience. He stressed the necessity of formulating operational solutions aligned with available resources and capacities in the cyberspace domain. "Unfortunately, a significant portion of so-called strategic documents and plans today have effectively become unusable and relegated to archives due to the neglect of these considerations," he stated. The president, in another part of his remarks, also stressed the need for a fundamental revision of the physical and multi-layered protection of the country's data, describing this as an essential priority in cyberspace governance.

Need for new solutions

Following the presentation of a report

by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology on the status and problems of digital economy businesses, Pezeshkian stated, "It is necessary to determine serious and new solutions to solve the problems of the digital economy sector so that these businesses face fewer difficulties." During the meeting, the security deputy of the National Center of Cyberspace presented a comprehensive report on the country's cybersecurity status and the success of experts in countering recent attacks. Emphasized by the council members and upon the president's directive, the Secretariat of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace was mandated to update cybersecurity guidelines and re-engineer related processes.



Meanwhile, Mohammad Amin Aqamiri, secretary of the Supreme Council of Cyberspace, also addressed the meeting, commending the efforts of digital economy businesses during the 12-day Israeli war, saying, "The digital economy sector, through its round-the-clock activities during the war, prevented the disruption of peo-

ple's lives in various areas including buying and selling, transportation, insurance, banking, etc., which is commendable." Council members also emphasized the necessity of serious pursuit in realizing the National Information Network, strengthening cybersecurity, and supporting the digital economy.

VP stresses foreign investment security as ‘overarching, unalterable policy



Economy Desk

First Vice President Mohammadreza Aref emphasized that "security for investments by Iranians abroad must be established as an overarching and unalterable policy." Speaking at Wednesday's meeting of the task force for realizing this year's slogan of "Investment for Production," Aref stressed the necessity of activating provinces — particularly border provinces — along with the private sector and overseas Iranians to attract investment and secure resources for the Seventh Development Plan, IRNA reported. Addressing the meeting, attended by the economy minister, the Central Bank governor, and relevant officials, the vice president noted that governments are the primary audience for annual slogans,

adding that economic issues, production, and investment have consistently been emphasized by the Leader in recent years. He underscored, "Investment for production is the most critical challenge in the Seventh Development Plan, and the means of securing required resources must be prioritized." Citing the government's neighborhood diplomacy policy, he stated that the administration and Ministry of Foreign Affairs have effectively expanded and deepened cooperation with neighboring states and regional unions like the Eurasian Economic Union. He added that the positive measures by the Foreign Ministry's Economic Department in Iran's embassies abroad must be vigorously continued. The first vice president asserted that Iran's foreign policy conditions under the current government are exceptional, noting that regional unions and bilateral relations with neighboring countries have created accessible pathways to overcome sanctions and attract investment. Aref emphasized the need to "more seriously utilize the private sector for investment and resource mobilization for the Seventh Development Plan." "Substantial capital exists domestically and abroad. Mechanisms must be established to leverage investments by overseas Iranians — including securing their investment safety — as current volatility has eroded trust in investment laws." This security, he concluded, must be embedded in an unalterable policy framework to assure Iranians abroad and alleviate past concerns.

Moscow urges enhanced Iran-Russia ties to offset sanctions

Economy Desk

Russia's deputy finance minister, during a meeting with Iran's ambassador, emphasized Moscow's support for Iran's membership in the BRICS New Development Bank while urging greater bilateral cooperation to counter unjust Western sanctions. During a Wednesday meeting in Moscow, Iranian Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali and Russian Deputy Finance Minister Ivan Chebskov discussed expanding cooperation in financial services, insurance, and taxation, ISNA reported. Jalali characterized bilateral relations as "progressively developing across all dimensions," noting that banking and financial collaboration between the two nations had "significantly expanded over the past two years." He added that cooperation in insurance and taxation was "advancing at an appreciable pace."



Highlighting both countries' BRICS membership, Jalali stated that Iranian-Russian financial and banking cooperation "could serve as a successful model for the BRICS alliance." The ambassador also endorsed Russian initiatives within BRICS and requested Moscow's backing for Iran's membership in the BRICS New Development Bank. Chebskov expressed satisfaction with the development of bilateral ties, particularly in banking and finance, affirming Russia's readiness to "continue and deepen this cooperation." He called for enhanced joint efforts to "counter unjust Western sanctions against Iran and Russia."

Iran attaché in Serbia sees \$400m trade jump in two years

Economy Desk

The commercial attaché of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Serbia, while enumerating the trade advantages of Iran and Serbia, predicted that trade between the two countries will increase to \$300-400 million by the end of the Persian year 1405 (March 2027). Faraz Chamani noted that while Serbia, with a population under 7 million, might not constitute a large market by itself, Iran attaches importance to the market due to its geopolitical position in Europe. The commercial attaché added that Serbia's trade infrastructure could serve as a commercial hub for Iran, IRNA reported. Emphasizing that Serbia has 15 free trade zones, he clarified, "Companies established in the free zones can export their manufactured goods to the entire European Union with zero tariffs; moreover, Serbia is connected

through free trade agreements with significant areas such as the European Union, the Eurasian Union, China, Turkey, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Balkan region countries. This is while this country has not yet joined the European Union." Mentioning that the dispatch of the Commercial Attaché of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Serbia in the year 1402 (beginning March 20, 2023) represented an effort by the Iranian side to develop trade with Serbia, Chamani stressed the establishment of Iranian production and export infrastructure in the European country. According to the official, prior to the dispatch of the commercial attaché, the official trade volume of the two countries was around \$29 million. He added, "However, we endeavored to develop trade grounds in this country by encouraging Iranian companies to establish and set up production lines

or packaging workshops and export centers in Serbia. We also pursued conditions for company registration, introduction of attorneys, legal advisors, real estate advisors, and expert market consultants."

55.4% increase in trade volume

"By the end of the year 1403 (March 20, 2025), the trade volume of the two countries approached approximately \$65 million, which appears to represent a 55.4% increase; it should be noted that the trade balance still remains positive for Iran. The commercial attaché predicted, "By the end of the year 1405 (March 2027), we will be able to increase the trade volume between Iran and Serbia to \$300-400 million." Chamani, listing the most important export items from Iran to Serbia over the past year, stated, "Polystyrene, polyethylene, dates, pistachios, dried

figs, fresh mangoes and pineapples, tobacco, bitumen, and petroleum products were the most important export goods, while phosphate fertilizers, industrial machinery, reactor equipment, grains, animal feed, seeds and saplings, non-organic chemical materials, wood, and some electrical and electronic equipment were the most important imports from Serbia." "Concluding a free trade agreement between Iran and Serbia; establishing a center for the distribution and re-export of Iranian dates in Serbia; establishing a center for the distribution and re-export of Iranian petroleum and petrochemical products in Serbia; participation of merchants from both countries in exhibition events and exchange of trade delegations; activating private Serbian customs to facilitate and expedite the entry of Iranian goods into the market; creating grounds for cooperation between



Iranian and Serbian contracting companies in joint projects; activating bus and air routes aimed at tourist exchange; establishing the first Iranian chain stores and restaurants in Serbia," are considered among the most important measures for developing trade between the two countries, he said.

From sanctioning of Francesca Albanese to US's violations of int'l law

Is it time to move UN headquarters?

PERSPECTIVE

Amid the raging crisis in Gaza and the ongoing war crimes against the Palestinian people, the recent news that Francesca Albanese, the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied territories, has been slapped with sanctions by the United States has once again brought to the fore a fundamental question: Has the time come to move the United Nations headquarters out of New York? The US government's decision to freeze Albanese's assets and bar her from setting foot on American soil is not only a tit-for-tat move against a human rights official who has spoken out, but also a dangerous sign that Washington is throwing international law and UN immunity out the window.

Francesca Albanese, a prominent figure in human rights and international justice, has repeatedly called out Israeli crimes in Gaza, the West Bank, and other occupied territories in her reports. She has also shed light on the role of global corporations such as Alphabet (Google), Amazon, Microsoft, Lockheed Martin, Caterpillar, and even MIT in propping up Israel's occupation infrastructure.

Most recently, her office put out a list of 48 companies, financial institutions, and educational bodies that have either cashed in on the occupation or been indirectly involved in war crimes. This report prompted the US to hit her with sanctions. Marco Rubio, the US secretary of state, stated in a threatening tone that this move was in response to Albanese's "efforts to prompt [the International Criminal Court] action against US and Israeli officials."

Sanctioning an official and independent UN expert has raised serious legal questions about America's commitment to the 1947 Headquarters Agreement. Under this agreement, the US is obliged to ensure the UN's free and impartial operation and grant international representatives and experts access to its meetings.

By imposing sanctions on Albanese, who is an Italian national operating out of Geneva, the US has shut the door on her entry to New York, effectively locking her out of UN events, including the General Assembly. This comes at a time when UN special rapporteurs should be guaranteed immunity for their independent and apolitical work.

Albanese, in response, did not mince words, describing the decision as "mafia-style intimidation techniques," and noting that such a move comes not from a dictatorship, but from a country that claims to be a champion of human rights and free speech.

This is not the first time the US has used its host status as a lever to turn up the heat or shut out individuals. In 1988, the US refused to issue a visa to Yasser Arafat, then-leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization, forcing the UN to move its session temporarily to Geneva to maintain neutrality.

In 2019, the US blocked 18 Russian diplomats from entering New York, prompting Russia to



propose shifting the First Committee meetings (on disarmament) to a neutral country. That same year, Iran's then-president Hassan Rouhani hinted at supporting the relocation of the UN headquarters, stating: "If there is a vote on moving the UN headquarters, Iran will vote for its transfer to a safer and more open-minded country."

In fact, repeated visa restrictions, biased conduct, and manipulation of host privileges have called into question the neutrality of the UN's host nation time and again.

Cost of telling truth

Veteran American journalist Chris Hedges writes that Albanese now faces death threats, character assassination, and unprecedented pressure from Israeli and American lobbies — not only for reporting on Israeli war crimes, but also for identifying governments and companies, both directly and indirectly

involved.

In her well-known report, "Genocide as Colonial Erasure," she clearly stated that what is happening in Gaza is a series of organized actions, including systematic killings, forced displacement, destruction of hospitals, and the annihilation of vital infrastructure for collective survival — all of which, under international law, add up to genocide.

Albanese has also warned that if international NGOs go along with or turn a blind eye to these actions, they may one day be held legally accountable.

Sanctioning Francesca Albanese lays bare the fact that the US not only fails to remain neutral regarding Israeli crimes but also uses its hosting power to clamp down on and silence independent voices.

What happened to Albanese could set a dangerous precedent for other countries, which may take a page out of this playbook

to confront human rights experts. Put simply, if this trend goes unchecked, in the future, no expert will dare to speak up for real victims.

All these developments have put a serious question on the table for the global community: Is it acceptable for the UN to remain hosted by a country that tramples on its commitments?

While a complete relocation of the UN headquarters may not be feasible in the short term for logistical and political reasons, a groundswell of global demand to shift parts of the organization's activities to neutral countries could serve as a symbolic and effective check on government intimidation tactics.

Moreover, revisiting and updating the 1947 Headquarters Agreement should be a top priority for the international community to solidify the rights of experts and human rights activists against political threats.

For decades, the United States has touted itself as a champion of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law on the global stage. But now, through actions such as sanctioning human rights experts, blacklisting the International Criminal Court, and offering blanket support for Israeli crimes, those masks are coming off fast.

Sanctioning Francesca Albanese is not just an isolated case; It is a symbol of the moral collapse of the international system under the thumb of a dominant power. Perhaps the time has come for the global community to move away from relying on hegemonic powers and build a new, balanced structure to defend human rights and world peace — one that listens to and backs independent experts, rather than threatening them.

The article first appeared in Persian on SNN.



In her 2023 book, titled 'J'accuse' (translation from French: I Accuse), Francesca Albanese (c), the UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the occupied territories, methodically lays out Israel's countless breaches of international law.

● AL MAJALLA



The US government's decision to freeze Albanese's assets and bar her from setting foot on American soil is not only a tit-for-tat move against a human rights official who has spoken out. Albanese, in response, did not mince words, describing the decision as "mafia-style intimidation techniques," and noting that such a move comes not from a dictatorship, but from a country that claims to be a champion of human rights and free speech.



The photo shows the tall, blue building of the UN Headquarters in New York, the US.

● UN



Sanctions on Albanese illegal, represent further US complicity in genocide


By Craig Mokhiber
Former head of
New York OHCHR
O P I N I O N

Fresh from face-to-face meetings in Washington with fugitive from justice Benjamin Netanyahu, indicted by the ICC for crimes against humanity, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio took the extraordinary step of declaring sanctions against the United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory Francesca Albanese.

The announcement was accompanied by a flurry of false and defamatory statements by Rubio attacking Albanese, further demonstrating the lengths to which the Trump administration (and the Israel proxies empowered within it) are willing to go to buttress the impunity of the Israeli regime.

Rubio's lawless action has been condemned and rejected by international organizations, experts, and human rights defenders across the globe as a moral outrage.

Indeed, outside of Washington (and the Israel lobby groups that hold dangerous sway there), Rubio's smears and his lawless imposition of sanctions will bring only condemnation of Rubio and the Trump administration. Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese is a highly respected expert and human rights defender, well known globally as an advocate who has dedicated her life to opposing all forms of bigotry and oppression and to promoting the cause of universal human rights.

She has been widely praised for carrying out her United Nations mandate with honor and with the highest degree of competence and integrity, particularly during the Israeli regime's 20 months of genocide in Palestine. But this action by the US government is not only a moral outrage. It is also entirely unlawful.

The sanctions order and its accompanying statements are a direct breach of the United Nations Charter, the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, and the Agreement Regarding the Headquarters of the United Nations (Host Country Agreement).

They represent a deliberate obstruction of the human rights mission of the United Nations. And given that this action is taken to insulate Israel and other perpetrators (including the corporations named in the Specials Rapporteur's latest report) from accountability for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide, it is also a breach of US obligations under the UN Genocide Convention (under which Israel is currently on trial in the International Court of Justice), and under Common Article 1 of the Geneva Conventions of 1949 (obliging the US to ensure that Israel and other parties respect the Conventions).

Furthermore, as this act by the Government of the United States was explicitly connected by the Secretary of State to its (also unlawful) sanctions against the International Criminal Court, it is also an offense against the administration of



US Secretary of State Marco Rubio (L) hugs Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at a news conference at the latter's office in the occupied al-Quds (Jerusalem) on February 16, 2025.
● THE GUARDIAN

justice as codified by Article 70 (1) (c) of the Rome Statute, for which territorial jurisdiction may be secured through the locus of the Court (the Netherlands, a state party to the Rome Statute), and through which Special Rapporteur Albanese may be entitled to reparations as a victim of the unlawful conduct.

Additionally, Special Rapporteur Albanese may be entitled to compensation for civil wrongs (torts) for economic and reputational damage, given the defamatory nature of Secretary Rubio's statements, and their manifest basis in "actual malice" and a "reckless disregard for the truth," recognized by US courts as exceptions to sovereign immunity.

Of course, as recent years have

demonstrated, the US cares little about international (or even domestic) legality. But external pressure and action are inevitable.

Outside the US, moves are underway to demand that the United States withdraw the sanctions and compensate Special Rapporteur Albanese for any and all economic, reputational, or emotional harms caused to her or her family, and compensate the United Nations for any damages done to her vital mandate.

The United Nations and all UN member states and regional organizations (like the EU) can and must publicly reject the sanctions, use all mechanisms at their control (of which there are many — legal, financial, political, and

diplomatic) to insulate the special rapporteur from their effects, speak out clearly in her defense, and use diplomatic channels to press the United States to lift the sanctions and compensate the special rapporteur.

If the many statements already issued by influential members of the international community are any indication, the lawless US government may soon learn that, in attacking Francesca Albanese in this way, it has crossed a bridge too far in its campaign for Israeli impunity.

And regardless of the short-term harms of this shameful act by the Trump administration, we can be certain that the US will not succeed in its ultimate objectives of silencing Albanese

and the broader UN, intimidating other human rights defenders, and guaranteeing the Israeli regime's impunity for war crimes, crimes against humanity, apartheid, and genocide. To the contrary, such brazen acts of lawlessness and complicity in genocide will only stoke the flames of resistance to these historic crimes, and to their co-perpetrators in Washington and Tel Aviv.

The global movement for solidarity with Palestine is growing. And, as has been evident since Rubio's latest shameless act, that movement stands unapologetically with Francesca Albanese. And so do I.

The article first appeared on Mondoweiss.



We can be certain that the US will not succeed in its ultimate objectives of silencing Albanese and the broader UN, intimidating other human rights defenders, and guaranteeing the Israeli regime's impunity for war crimes, crimes against humanity, apartheid, and genocide. To the contrary, such brazen acts of lawlessness and complicity in genocide will only stoke the flames of resistance to these historic crimes, and to their co-perpetrators in Washington and Tel Aviv.

Francesca Albanese, the UN special rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories (R), meets people and speaks to the press ahead of her talk at Queen Mary University of London in London, United Kingdom, on November 12, 2024.
● KRISTIAN BUUS/IN PICTURES

New coach Hashemian eyes 'offensive, trophy-winning' football with Persepolis

Sports Desk

New Persepolis head coach Vahid Hashemian says the Tehran Reds' fans can expect an attack-minded type of football from his team when the new Persian Gulf Pro League season gets underway.

Hashemian, 48, was appointed to the Persepolis job earlier in the month, succeeding Turkish coach Ismail Kartal, who parted ways with the club in the aftermath of the 12-day war between Iran and Israel.

While his appointment is widely seen as a major gamble for the club, given his significant lack of experience as a head coach at the senior level, Hashemian's tactical approach remains unknown for the supporters.

Hashemian says he will aim for instant success at the new role, and believes that an offensive, front-foot game plan will help him achieve that goal.

"Persepolis is a massive club with a championship-winning pedigree. Their fans always demand titles, so when I joined Persepolis, my mindset was the same: Winning trophies," former Persepolis and Iran striker said in a first interview with the club's official website.

"The players here must have a champion's mentality. The football we play must be attack-minded and high-scoring, yet efficient and results-driven. "The current squad's qualities, the club's philosophy and history, and my own vision must all come together to deliver success.

"It is essential for every manager's approach to align with



● PERSEPOLIS FC

the club's philosophy and history. That is why the likes of Jose Mourinho or Carlos Queiroz could never coach Bayern Munich, as their tactics hardly reflect Bayern's philosophy, which is rooted in attacking football," added Hashemian, who played for Bayern in the 2004/05 season.

The Iranian will be looking to build on his distinguished career as a player, having scored 53 goals in 254 appearances for Bundesliga clubs VfL Bochum, Hannover 96, Hamburger SV,

and Bayern Munich before hanging up his boots at Persepolis in 2012.

Hashemian began his coaching career in Germany's fifth tier before taking up an assistant role with Hamburg's U17 side in the 2017/18 campaign. He also served as a number two to former Iran managers Marc Wilmots and Dragan Skocic during the 2022 World Cup Asian qualifiers.

Asked if Persepolis players should expect the kind of intense discipline, for which the

German football is best known, from their new manager, Hashemian simply replied: "Absolutely. Strict discipline has always been a top priority for me and that is what I demand from the players on and off the pitch."

Many believe Hashemian has inherited a star-studded, yet imbalanced squad at Persepolis, after the club signed four established wingers – along with goalkeeper Payam Niazmand and attacking midfielder Reza Shekari – at Kartal's behest

during the current transfer window, while a center-back, a right fullback, and a holding midfielder are likely to be on the new manager's wishlist ahead of the upcoming season.

Hashemian, however, says he is already pleased with the players at his disposal, though he would welcome further additions to the squad.

"I worked with many of these Persepolis players during my time at the national team, so I know their qualities well. In the few days I've been with the

team, I've seen that we have impactful players, especially some promising young talents. These youngsters just need a little more time to flourish and improve through hard work. I'm confident they'll be very valuable assets for the club.

"We need to recruit players for certain positions, but we're also satisfied with the players we currently have. We have experienced, quality players, as well as younger ones, who have been performing well too. We'll move forward with this squad. If, over time, we identify a player for the positions we need – someone who can contribute and help the team improve – we'll make a move, but we're in no rush," said Hashemian, who is with his team in a training camp in Turkey.

Hashemian insists there are no limits to his ambitions as head coach.

"I have multiple goals in football, and that is to coach Persepolis, the Iranian national team, and even Bayern Munich. No one expected I would play for Bayern Munich or Bochum one day. But when I saw Iranian players going abroad to play, I thought: Then I can do it too.

"A dream can come true if you work for it, but if you don't put in the effort, it's just like a lottery ticket – you might win, or you might not. When a dream becomes your ambition and goal, you strive for it.

"When Persepolis approached me some three weeks ago, I told them that I'd love to be the head coach of this team because I could see tremendous potential in the squad."

Asian Men's U16 Volleyball Championship: Iran beats South Korea to advance to last four

Sports Desk

Iran began the second group phase of the AVC Men's U16 Championship with a victory, defeating South Korea 3-1 (25-21, 27-29, 25-22, 25-20) in Nakhon Pathom, Thailand, on Wednesday.

A fourth successive win in the Thai city secured a last-four spot for the defending champion at the second edition of the tournament.

"The Iranian players were under a bit of pressure due to the importance of the game, but thank

God they controlled the game and walked away with the victory," Iran head coach Arash Sadeqiani said after the game.

The top spot in the group will be on the line when Iran and Pakistan Square off in the final round of Pool F fixtures today.

Yet to concede a single set in the tournament, Pakistan eased to a 3-0 triumph (25-23, 25-20, 25-20) over Indonesia later on Wednesday to leapfrog Iran on top of the pool table.

Having arrived in the host coun-

try on the eve of the competition, Iran began its title defence with a 3-1 win against Indonesia, before coming out victorious against Hong Kong, and Kazakhstan in straight sets to finish atop the Pool B standings.

Elsewhere on Wednesday, Japan beat Thailand 3-0 in Pool E to close in on a last-four place.

The top four teams of the tournament will represent the continent at next year's FIVB U17 World Championship in Doha, Qatar.



Iranian boys celebrate a point during a 3-1 victory over South Korea at the Asian U16 Volleyball Championship in Nakhon Pathom, Thailand, on July 16, 2025.
● volleyball.ir

Oman appoint ex-Iran coach Queiroz as manager



● GETTY IMAGES

AFC – Oman named Carlos Queiroz as their new head coach on Tuesday as the West Asian side bid to reach the FIFA World Cup 2026. The Portuguese replaces Rashid Jaber, and has been appointed ahead of the AFC Asian Qualifiers™ - Road to 26 Playoff draw at the AFC House in Kuala Lumpur on today.

Oman secured their place in the playoffs after finishing fourth in Group B. Queiroz's wealth of tactical expertise and experience

will be pivotal as Oman, chasing a historic FIFA World Cup appearance, are set to face some of the continent's top teams with just tickets available in the playoffs.

"Queiroz has extensive coaching experience, having led the national teams of Portugal, Islamic Republic of Iran, Colombia, Egypt, and Qatar. He also served as an assistant coach at Manchester United under Sir Alex Ferguson," the Oman FA said on social me-

dia platform X. Oman will be joined by Iraq, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates in the draw, with the teams to be divided into two groups.

The respective group winners will seal automatic qualification while the two second-placed teams will square off in a playoff, with the triumphant side to advance to an Inter-Confederation playoff where an additional ticket to the Finals will be at stake.

Timeless Abbasabad Caravanserai; a symbol of Iran’s heritage

Iranica Desk

Abbasabad Caravanserai in Khorasan Razavi Province is a gem along the Silk Road and one of Iran’s valuable historical sites, recognized as an attractive destination for both domestic and international tourists, said a cultural heritage expert. Alireza Yavari, in an interview with ISNA, explained that this historic caravanserai, which once served as a resting and trading place for merchants, has recently been transformed into a site for revitalizing Iran’s rich culture and history through conservation efforts and attention to tourism infrastructure. He emphasized that by introducing and preserving this cultural heritage site, it is possible to achieve sustainable development and improve the local economic situation. He added that restoring this historic building not only preserves and maintains it but also protects it from damage caused by natural factors, especially rain penetration through the roof. The expert considered the restoration of this building a significant factor in strengthening the region’s tourism infrastructure. He stated that Abbasabad Caravanserai, located 28 kilometers northwest of Taybad and along the old route from this city to Torbat-e Jam, is regarded as one of Iran’s most valuable historic sites. Referring to its strategic location along the Silk Road and its unique architecture, Yavari highlighted its special importance. He explained that this caravanserai, which dates back to the Safavid era, was historically used as a commercial center and resting place for travelers and merchants, and has now become a major tourist attraction. Yavari added that this structure



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includes two courtyards, an ivan (porch or alcove), small rooms, and a cistern. In many ways, its architecture beautifully reflects the skill and creativity of the architects of that time, who used local materials and traditional techniques to create a lasting masterpiece. He also pointed out that, for better protection, Abbasabad Caravanserai was registered on Iran’s National Heritage List on September 23, 1999, and was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2023. This international recognition highlights the significance and

value of the site at a global level. He noted that this designation not only enhances the fame of this historical site but can also attract more tourists to the area, leading to economic prosperity. Yavari further explained that Taybad itself is a historic city with a rich cultural heritage, boasting 71 registered historical buildings listed on Iran’s National Heritage List and one UNESCO World Heritage site. The city, with its diverse historical assets, reflects the long-standing importance of the region as a crossroads of

cultures and trade routes. Preserving Taybad’s heritage not only helps sustain its identity but also offers significant potential for attracting tourism and boosting local development. This heritage researcher noted that the site includes a caravanserai, a castle, and an archaeological site dating back to the Timurid and Qajar periods, adding, “The rich cultural and historical heritage of this region not only helps preserve its identity but also offers a significant advantage in attracting tourists.” He continued, “As tourism in the

region develops, the restoration and reconstruction of caravansaries and other historic buildings can aid in preserving the country’s cultural and historical legacy, while also creating employment opportunities and generating income for local residents.” Yavari, referring to the long history of caravansaries in Iran, explained, “These structures historically served as resting and trading points along major travel routes, facilitating the movement of travelers and merchants.” He also emphasized the impor-

tance of these buildings, stating, “When caravansaries thrived, they not only contributed to the safety of journeys but also encouraged cultural and economic exchanges. In fact, they functioned as social and cultural centers and laid the foundation for human interaction.” This heritage expert considers the restoration and rebuilding of caravansaries an essential task today. He invites all those interested in history and culture to visit and help preserve these historic sites, so they may enjoy Iran’s beauty and cultural richness.

Enjoy enchanting scenery of Bostanak Canyon in Fars Province

Iranica Desk

Bostanak Canyon, located within the ancient city of Marvdasht in the Fars province of Iran, has special and very favorable weather conditions due to its strategic location among two or more mountains, which creates a natural microclimate. Imagine a cool river or spring gently flowing beside this pleasant environment, providing a refreshing escape

from the heat during warmer months. Bostanak Canyon is part of a historically rich region famous for its proximity to the ancient ruins of Persepolis and Pasargadae, which are UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Marvdasht itself is a vibrant city known for its cultural heritage and as a gateway to explore the natural and historical beauty of southern Iran. The canyon, often referred to as the “Lost Paradise,” covers an

area of approximately 15,324 hectares and is renowned for its breathtaking scenery and ecological significance. Its elevation ranges between 1,700 and 2,700 meters, making it an ideal spot to enjoy cool, fresh air even during the hottest seasons of the year. This altitude provides a comfortable climate for visitors seeking relief from Iran’s typically warm climate during summer. Bostanak Canyon boasts a rich

variety of wildlife, including species such as brown bears, hyenas, weasels, bezoar ibex, Iranian hedgehogs, mouse-like hamsters, Eurasian badgers, wildcats, Persian squirrels, foxes, jackals, and various bird species like wild pigeons and partridges. Its diverse vegetation includes Persian turpentine trees, oaks, hawthorns, junipers, wild almonds, Acer monspessulatum, yarrow, and thyme, making it a haven for nature lovers and ecologists alike.

Recognized for its ecological importance, Bostanak was inscribed on list of the province’s protected areas in 1999, ensuring its preservation for future generations to appreciate and study. The best time to visit Bostanak Canyon and enjoy its lush surroundings is during late April and May (spring) through mid-summer. While autumn and winter also unveil stunning scenery, the colder weather in

May might be less comfortable for some travelers. Still, each season offers its own unique charm, from the vibrant blooms of spring to the tranquil snows of winter. In sum, Bostanak Canyon, nestled within the natural and cultural hub of Marvdasht in Fars Province, offers a captivating blend of scenic beauty, biodiversity, and historical context — truly a paradise lost and waiting to be rediscovered.



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Iran among world's top 20 tourist destinations

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran was named one of the world's top 20 tourist destinations, according to the latest figures from the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism), Iranian Deputy Tourism Minister Anoushirvan Mohseni Bandpey said July 16 in Tehran. Speaking at a meeting of the Visit Iran international website policy council on July 14, Bandpey cited a UN report highlighting Iran's global ranking in the months leading up to the 12-day war earlier this year, IRNA reported. He described the country's performance in the final quarter of the Iranian calendar year, December 2024 through March 2025, as "the region's best," calling it a sign of policy maturity, industry resilience, and a "new window into public diplomacy."

Iran's placement reflects a combination of factors, including improved infrastructure, strategic private-public collaboration, and a more accurate global narrative about the country, Bandpey said. The national tourism portal Visit Iran, backed by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, has played a central role in promoting Iran as a stable and attractive destination. Officials say this momentum must now be sustained through intensified international marketing. "This is not just about numbers," Bandpey told the gathering of senior government officials, tourism entrepreneurs, and media representatives. "It's about smart policymaking and showing the real face of Iran to the world." He called for the platform to evolve beyond a basic infor-

mation hub into a powerful tool for destination branding, perception management, and public diplomacy. Planned upgrades to Visit Iran include redesigned content based on tourist behavior analysis, interactive smart travel guides, multilingual and multimedia storytelling by local creators, and partnerships with global marketing experts. Bandpey emphasized the importance of combining state and private sector efforts to transform the website into a "global tourism brand." With hopes for a rebound from recent geopolitical shocks, officials see this recognition as both a milestone and a motivator. "Regaining our global tourism standing is no longer a distant dream," said Bandpey. "It's within reach, if we continue to tell our story strategically."



● IRNA

Tehran launches permanent Persian literature section at Bangkok's TK Park Library



Arts & Culture Desk

Iran inaugurated a permanent shelf of Persian books at Bangkok's TK Park library on Saturday as part of its week-long cultural initiative titled 'Reading Iran', marking the 70th anniversary of diplomatic ties with Thailand, according to Iran's Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO). Held at CentralWorld's sixth floor, the event featured film screenings, calligraphy and miniature painting workshops,

a crafts and lifestyle exhibition, and a cultural tour, all culminating in the launch of a dedicated section of Iranian books aimed at Thai readers. Organizers said the shelf was designed to promote "cross-cultural dialogue" and deepen mutual understanding through literature, history, and the arts. The collection includes classic and contemporary Persian poetry, historical studies, and cultural texts. Many volumes are paired with

Thai or English translations to broaden access for non-Persian speakers. The books are now available to the public through TK Park's lending system. The shelf stands in the library's "World Cultures" section and has been decorated with Iranian visual motifs and symbols. It is intended as a long-term cultural foothold, unlike previous temporary showcases, and signals a more sustained Iranian presence in Thailand's public cultural

scene. Iran's cultural attaché in Bangkok called the initiative a "strategic investment" in soft diplomacy. "This isn't just a display — it's a lasting bridge between the two peoples," he said during the unveiling. TK Park, or Thailand Knowledge Park, is a public library and cultural center under the Thai Ministry of Culture. The new Iranian section is expected to serve students, researchers, and readers interested in Asian civilizations.

Iranian animated series 'Javanmardan' picked for Belarus Animaueuka

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian animated series 'Javanmardan,' (literally translated as 'The Chivalrous'), produced by Saba Animation Center, was selected to compete at the 2025 Animaueuka International Festival in Belarus, the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) confirmed on July 16. The selection was made by the IRIB's General Directorate of International Media Affairs, which submitted the series as an official entry to the festival. Animaueuka, running from September 24 to 26 in the eastern city of Mogilev, is considered one of the leading animation events in Eastern Europe. Since its founding in 1998, the festival has drawn top-tier global talent and entries across three main categories—professional films, children's content, and visual arts. 'Javanmardan' tells an epic tale of resistance against the Mongol invasion, portraying themes of valor, faith, and patriotism through a blend of national and religious symbolism. Its creators have described it as



a "historical and heroic narrative" highlighting Iran's cultural legacy. The IRIB said the work's inclusion marks a "major step" in showcasing Iranian animation on the world stage. For Tehran's cultural diplomacy, the selection is seen as more than symbolic, it's a chance to reflect the country's rich storytelling traditions through a modern artistic lens. The 'Javanmardan' series is part of Saba's wider push to export Islamic-Iranian values through soft power.

Military drama 'God of War' to premiere in Lebanon

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's controversial military drama 'God of War' will kick off its international theatrical run in Lebanon on July 18, according to a statement released by Owj Arts and Media Organization on Wednesday. The film is directed by Hossein Darabi, produced by Saeed Sa'di, and developed by Mohammadreza Shafah, all known figures in Iran's state-backed cinema scene, ILNA reported. The film dramatizes the launch of Iran's first post-revolution missile and aims to portray what it calls the country's "military strength" through cinematic language. Produced by Owj, a state-funded group tied to Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the film blends defense propaganda with a modern storytelling ap-

proach and seeks to reshape regional narratives through cultural export. 'God of War' was first screened at Iran's Fajr Film Festival earlier this year. Its international debut marks a calculated move by Tehran to leverage soft power in the Arab world amid rising regional tensions. The cast features a roster of well-known Iranian actors, including Saed Soheili, Hossein Soleimani, Payam Ahmadiania, and Nader Fallah. The film follows a fictionalized account of Iran's early missile program. "This time, it's our turn to launch the first missile," reads the tagline, underscoring the nationalistic tone. The narrative seeks to align with Tehran's broader messaging strategy by revisiting what it views as key moments in its post-1979 military history. The Lebanese release comes as



Iran ramps up its cultural outreach across the Middle East, often using cinema, television, and literature to promote its strategic narratives. Further international screenings are expected but have not yet been officially announced.