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Iran's Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi (3rd L, front row) and his counterparts pose for a family photo during a meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on water resources management in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on October 22, 2025.
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The way to ease US-Iran standoff

By M.A. Mokarrami
Journalist, commentator

OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

The instigation of the UN "snapback" mechanism and the return of sanctions have once again placed Iran and the United States at a critical juncture. Washington believes that intensified economic and political pressure can force Tehran into accepting fresh negotiations. Iranian officials, however, maintain that dialogue is possible only when based on mutual respect, equality and reciprocity. Between these two views lies a narrow diplomatic space. US President Donald Trump has publicly declared that he is ready to strike "the best deal" with Iran. Yet simultaneously, his administration has launched a "maximum pressure" campaign to "create the environment for diplomacy." Reports in the Wash-

ington Post suggest that this approach seeks to compel Iran to accept a series of conditions, including zero uranium enrichment and limits on missile capabilities. For Tehran, these demands resemble a call for unilateral concession rather than genuine dialogue. Iran's official response has been firm but measured. Senior diplomats have stated that Iran would consider any proposal that is "reasonable, balanced and fair," but it will not abandon its right to peaceful uranium enrichment and expects reciprocal steps to restore trust. This stance reflects Iran's long-standing approach to diplomacy: openness to engagement, but rejection of coercion. The assumption in Washington that pressure can deliver a diplomatic breakthrough is a misconception. Decades of experience show that external pressure tends to harden Iran's negotiating position. The war in June, when coordinated Israeli and US strikes targeted Iranian nuclear sites, made this clearer. Instead of deterring

Tehran, such actions reinforced its determination to resist and strengthen its defense and deterrence capabilities. Under such military threats, expecting discussions on missile limitations is unrealistic. Economically, Iran has so far been able to cope with the reimposed sanctions with relative stability. The government has prevented the kind of panic seen in previous sanction periods by stabilizing financial markets. This resilience reduces the leverage of external pressure and means Tehran sees no need to rush into an unfavorable deal. Still, Iran's leadership is fully aware of the long-term costs of sustaining an economy under sanctions. Its approach remains pragmatic: diplomacy is a viable path if conducted on fair and balanced terms. Yet meaningful negotiations require a realistic framework. With both sides divided on key issues, a comprehensive agreement appears distant. However, small, concrete steps could help rebuild the

minimal trust necessary to move forward. Maintaining informal communication channels with US intermediaries is therefore essential. Through these channels, Tehran should continue delivering two clear messages: first, that it will resist economic and military pressure; second, that this resistance does not preclude openness to reasonable proposals considering mutual interests. History offers useful guidance. During the five rounds of talks earlier this year—before the June conflict—Iranian and American experts reportedly made tangible progress on technical issues related to uranium enrichment. They examined mechanisms such as a regional consortium for enrichment and enhanced verification under international supervision. Although those talks were suspended after the attacks, the technical groundwork remains relevant and could serve as a realistic starting point.

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Iran won't return to nuclear talks as long as US makes 'unreasonable demands': FM

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Wednesday that Iran would not return to the negotiating table as long as the United States makes "excessive" and "unreasonable" demands. "Talks that were ongoing with the US as well as New York negotiations were suspended and did not go forward because of excessive demands of the American side," Araghchi told reporters upon his arrival to the northeastern city of Mashhad where he attended a provincial conference. "We have shown that we have always been committed to diplomatic solutions, but this does not mean giving up the rights of the Iranian people. Wherever the interests of the Iranian people and the interests of the country have been secured through diplomacy, we have taken action. However, we are faced with those who have nev-

er committed to diplomacy," he added. Iran and the United States held five rounds of negotiations through Omani mediators before Israel launched a 12-day aggression against the country on June 13. US President Donald Trump's decision to join Israel in striking Iranian nuclear facilities effectively ended the talks which were set to resume on June 15. The aggression claimed the lives of more than 1,000 Iranians, most of them civilians. Despite the war, both Iran and the US signaled willingness to return to the negotiating table, though Tehran has said it will not abandon its right to enrich uranium – as demanded by Washington. "Regardless of the past experience, this year five rounds of negotiations were held, and during the talks, Iran came under attack. The US also supported the strike," Araghchi said.



Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (c) talks with reporters upon his arrival to the northeastern city of Mashhad to take part in a provincial conference on October 22, 2025.

● IRNA

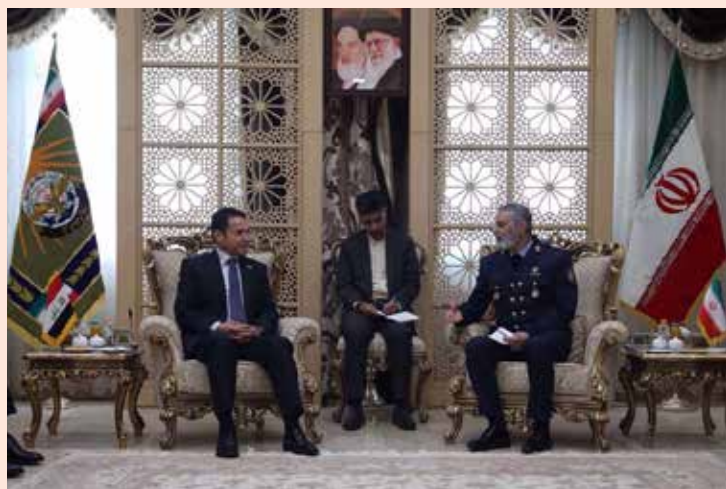
The top diplomat noted that return to the negotiations would not be possible as long as such approach exists, unless US officials change their approach. In 2015, Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany reached an agreement that saw the easing of sanctions on Tehran in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program. But the US unilaterally walked out of it in 2018 and reimposed biting economic sanctions. Tehran adhered to the deal even a year after Washington's withdrawal, but a year later it began rolling back on its



commitments. The European parties to the deal also failed to fulfill their commitment to the accord. Several rounds of talks to revive the agreement failed, and in August, Brit-

ain, Germany and France triggered the snapback of sanctions on Iran process on the pretext of Tehran's non-compliance with its obligations, leading to the re-imposition of the UN sanctions.

Top general calls for full implementation of security deal with Iraq



Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi (R) meets with Iraqi National Security Advisor Qasim al-Araji in Tehran on October 22, 2025.

● IRNA

Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi stressed the importance of fully implementing the security agreement between Iran and Iraq, calling for increased cooperation between the two countries to maintain regional security. General Mousavi made the remarks in a meeting with a high-ranking Iraqi delegation led by Iraqi National Security Advisor Qasim al-Araji in the capital Tehran on Wednesday, Press TV reported. Mousavi also hailed the strong bond and brotherhood between Iran and Iraq, much to the dismay of the United States and the two countries' adversaries.

He also pointed out that the recent attacks by the US and the Israeli regime on Iran exposed Washington's plans to wrest control over Iraq. According to Iran's General Staff of the Armed Forces, Israeli fighter jets used US-controlled airspace over Iraq to launch missiles at Iranian military sites during the regime's June act of aggression against Iran. "If the recent acts of aggression by the Zionist regime and the United States against the Islamic Republic of Iran had not occurred, Washington's true intentions in seeking control over Iraq's affairs might not have been fully revealed," he said, referring to the presence of US-led military

coalition in the Arab country. Araji, for his part, highlighted the deep and special ties between the two nations and reaffirmed Iraq's commitment to fulfill the terms of the security agreement with Iran. Referring to the June 12-day war against Iran, he noted that despite losses, the Iranian people stood united in support of their armed forces and government and manifested their resilience. Araji further emphasized the necessity of enhancing military, political, and economic cooperation to contribute to regional stability, reiterating the commitment of both the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government to uphold Iran's security and prevent the use of Iraqi territory against neighboring states, particularly Iran. Back in August, Iran and Iraq signed a memorandum of understanding in Baghdad to boost security along the border. During his state visit to Iran, the Iraqi official also called on President Masoud Pezeshkian, security chief Ali Larijani, Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf and other senior officials.

UN high court rebukes Israel over Gaza aid restrictions

The United Nations' top court issued a legal opinion Wednesday stating that Israel, as an occupying power, is obligated to work with UN agencies to facilitate humanitarian aid in Gaza, a rebuke of the blockade it imposed on the Palestinian territory earlier this year. The International Court of Justice also said in its advisory opinion that the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), the main UN body serving Palestinian refugees, has not violated impartiality, CNN reported. "The occupying power may never invoke reasons of security to justify the general suspension of all humanitarian activities in occupied territory," Judge Iwasawa Yuji said while deliver-

ing the opinion. "After examining the evidence, the court finds that the local population in Gaza Strip has been inadequately supplied." The opinion was requested by the UN General Assembly in December after Israel passed laws banning UNRWA, from operating in the country, significantly curtailing its ability to deliver aid to Gaza. The advisory opinion – aimed at addressing Israel's obligations to the UN, aid organizations and third-party states in the occupied West Bank and Gaza – is non-binding, but it does carry political weight and is expected to increase pressure on Israel to cooperate with the UN and other aid agencies.

Minister urges ambassadors in neighboring countries to help attract tourists

National Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri called on Iranian ambassadors in regional and neighboring nations to help draw more tourists into the country. Addressing a regional conference on provincial diplomacy in northeastern city of Mashhad, Salehi-Amiri said that visitors from five important regions – Central Asia and the Caucasus, Turkey, Pakistan, the Persian Gulf area – are interested in coming to Iran. Referring to the government's plans for attracting more tourists, he said that the Parliament had already approved five incentive plans which were "unprecedented" and could lead to a major development in the country's tourism. "As of this year, all investors have been able to build multipur-

pose accommodations throughout Iran," the minister said referring to the incentive plans. He also added that the import of 200 essential goods used in hotels would be subject to zero tariffs and customs duties. Iran has lagged behind neighboring countries in tourism. The country's Seventh Economic Development Plan highlights growing the tourism sector in the next four years and the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts aims to attract 15 million tourists annually. Iran received 6.2 million foreign tourists in 2023 and nearly 7.4 million in 2024. Arrivals dipped in June and July 2025 following a 12-day aggression by Israel and the US against Iran. According to the latest figures from the United Nations World Tourism Organization, Iran was named one of the world's top 20 tourist destinations.

The way to ...

A recent proposal by former US energy secretary Ernest Moniz outlines an innovative roadmap: a "regional nuclear condominium," distributing different stages of the nuclear fuel cycle among Persian Gulf countries under international oversight. Enrichment facilities, for example, could be located on an island in the Persian Gulf administered by the United Nations or a multinational body. While Tehran would likely object to certain elements of this plan, the broader concept of regional cooperation in peaceful nuclear technology merits serious consideration. From Iran's perspective, any such

proposal would require significant modification to safeguard sovereign rights and ensure equitable benefits. Still, exploring these ideas through technical and diplomatic discussions could yield practical results. For this to happen, Washington must move beyond the illusion of a "grand bargain" that resolves every issue at once. The experience of the JCPOA and US withdrawal from it have shown that ambitious, all-encompassing deals are fragile. A step-by-step approach—focused first on limited, verifiable arrangements providing tangible security and economic benefits to both sides—is more sustainable. Ultimately, the future of Iran-US

diplomacy depends less on declarations of willingness than on the realism of expectations. Iran will not negotiate under duress, and the United States cannot force it to do so. Yet both have reasons to avoid further confrontation: Iran seeks economic relief and recognition of its rights; the US wants to avoid another Middle Eastern conflict. In this overlap of interests lies the possibility of a modest but meaningful diplomatic opening. Incremental steps such as technical cooperation and revived channels may not produce a grand agreement, but they could gradually restore trust and open the door to practical diplomatic gains.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Minister calls for water cooperation among Muslim nations at OIC meeting



Iran's Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi (10th L) poses for a photo with fellow OIC Ministers in Charge of Water at the 5th Session of the OIC Conference in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, on October 22, 2025.

Economy Desk

Iran's Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi on Wednesday urged Muslim countries to work together on water management at a ministerial meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), calling it both "a technical necessity and a faith-based responsibility toward present and future generations."

Speaking at the 5th Session of the OIC Conference of Ministers in Charge of Water in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Aliabadi said water issues could be a source of competition and conflict, but Islamic civiliza-

tion's history had offered examples of collective wisdom and social participation rooted in faith, justice, and knowledge.

According to IRNA, he called for the revival of traditional water systems such as qanats and roofed underground water cisterns "through science and faith, and within the framework of modern joint policies."

The minister hailed Iran's successful experience in achieving "self-sufficiency and sustainable development in the water sector" in cooperation with regional and neighboring countries.

Aliabadi added that Iranian experts had designed and implemented projects for the transfer and distribution of potable water, the construction of large and medium-sized dams with environmental considerations, and the development of indigenous technologies for water and wastewater treatment, modern irrigation, and water quality monitoring.

"Iran has managed, despite severe and cruel sanctions, to build large dams, hydroelectric power plants, and water and wastewater treatment facilities both domestically and in other countries," he said.

Iran, with its predominantly semi-arid and arid climate, faces water stress and crisis, and the supply of drinking water has now become one of the biggest challenges in many provinces, and cities.

According to statistics, Iran is ranked as the world's third-largest dam-building nation, with around 190 active and under construction dams.

Shared challenges with neighbors

Aliabadi noted that Iran and its neighbors faced common challenges, including climate change, declining rainfall, ris-

ing evaporation and pressure on surface and groundwater resources.

"We are striving to move toward convergence rather than competition and confrontation," he said.

He pointed to the fact that Iran had a long and active record in managing trans-boundary rivers and shared water resources, seeking to resolve environmental and water-related issues through cooperation and mutual respect rather than political confrontation.

Aliabadi emphasized the importance of exchanging experiences among Islamic nations in managing water resources in arid and semi-arid regions, applying modern technologies to reduce agricultural water use and distribution losses, managing droughts, floods, and water pollution, and ensuring access to safe drinking water for all.

He also called for joint investment in advanced desalination, treatment, and wastewater recycling technologies that observe environmental safeguards.

The minister proposed the establishment of two new bodies — the council for sustainable water and food security of Islamic countries and the Islamic water innovation center — to promote technology transfer and experience sharing.

Iran ratifies law to join UN convention against terror financing



Economy Desk

Iran approved its accession to the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism (CFT), with President Masoud Pezeshkian signing the law and instructing its implementation by related ministries and organizations, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

The move came just a day before the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) plenary in Paris on October 22-24, where delegates from over 200 jurisdictions would discuss mutual evaluations and global efforts to combat money laundering and terror financing.

In a letter on Tuesday, Pezeshkian signed into law Iran's accession to the international convention and instructed its implementation by the Judiciary, the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Intelligence, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance, and the Central Bank of Iran.

The Expediency Council, a top body that reviews parliamentary bills for final approval, conditionally gave the go-ahead to Iran's accession to the CFT earlier this month.

Speaking on October 1, spokesman for the council Mohsen Dehnavi the top body introduced an additional condition under which would prioritize its Constitution and domestic laws when complying with the CFT.

Iran is attending the FATF meetings in Paris for first time in six years as it tries to get off a global financial blacklist.

The task force blacklisted Iran in 2020 mainly for not adopting the Palermo Convention and the CFT. After halting debates on the two conventions over concerns they might undermine Iran's financial independence, the Expediency Council approved the Palermo convention in May.

Officials with the Iranian Ministry of Economic Affairs and Finance say the FATF would start to reconsider its designation of Iran only after the country approves the CFT and that it would do so in its upcoming meetings.

Economic experts say Iran should be removed from FATF's blacklist to be able to maintain its ongoing trade and business relations with countries that reject UN and US sanction policies against Tehran.

Iran, China to co-build mini refinery in southwest

Iran and China plan to jointly build a mini oil refinery in the southwestern province of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, part of Tehran's drive to expand domestic refining capacity, Governor General Yadollah Rahmani said on Wednesday.

The refinery, with a processing capacity of 50,000 barrels of crude per day (bpd), will be developed in Bahmai County, an oil-rich region that hosts more than 80 active wells, Rahmani told IRNA following a meeting with Chinese investors.

"This region enjoys a strategic position for investment in the oil, gas and petrochemical sectors," Rahmani said, adding that 25% of Iran's crude oil — mostly destined for

export — was produced in this province, which also ranked second nationwide in gas output.

Iran pumps more than 3.5 million bpd of crude and churns out a daily average of 750 million cubic meters of gas.

The governor said the project would help supply part of Iran's domestic demand for petroleum products while boosting the province's share of refined product exports.

Discussions during the meeting with the Chinese delegation focused on the technical, financial and scheduling details of the project, with both sides agreeing to finalize feasibility studies and break ground in the coming months.

Rahmani said the province

was committed to supporting foreign investors.

"Easing administrative procedures for investors is on the agenda," he noted, adding that 71 investment projects had been planned for the province, with a significant number expected to move into the implementation phase soon.

The new joint venture fits into the Oil Ministry's broader plan to promote the construction of small-scale refineries by private and foreign investors, which require less capital but can swiftly increase the country's overall refining capacity.

Iran has ten major refineries with a combined capacity of 2.4 million bpd, producing gasoline, diesel and other petroleum products.



In May, Deputy Oil Minister Mohammad-Sadeq Azimifar announced that Iran aimed to commission new refining projects worth \$3 billion by March 2026 to beef up domestic fuel output and reduce reliance on imports.

Fuel shortages have be-

come a growing concern for the government. The mismatch between production and demand — estimated at over 20 million liters of gasoline per day — has forced Tehran to spend billions of dollars annually on fuel imports since 2021.

New generation of energy experts needed, Paknejad says ahead of GECF gathering

Iran's Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad on Wednesday called for the development of a new generation of energy specialists a day before a meeting of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) in Doha, Qatar. "Today's developments in the oil and gas industry require training a new generation of specialists familiar with international frameworks and technological advances to prepare for the future of energy," Paknejad told Qatari Energy Minister Saad Al-Kaabi during a bilateral meeting. Paknejad also emphasized expanding cooperation and maintaining constructive engagement in energy matters, IRNA reported. Kaabi welcomed the strengthening of bilateral energy ties and called for deeper collaboration between the two nations. In separate meetings, Paknejad met with his counterparts from Libya, Algeria, and Nigeria, highlighting the importance of leveraging shared capacities and boosting bilateral cooperation across multiple energy fields.

Envoy: 87% of Iran-Russia trade exempt from tariffs



Economy Desk

Iran's Ambassador to Russia, Kazem Jalali, said on Wednesday that 87% of trade between the two countries is exempt from bilateral tariffs, urging Iranian provinces, particularly the three Khorasan provinces in northeastern Iran, to take advantage of the opportunity.

Jalali told reporters on the sidelines of the second Provincial Diplomacy Meeting in

Mashhad that trade between Iran and Russia was growing rapidly.

"Trade between the two countries amounted to \$650 million in 2023, the figure climbed to \$1.8 billion last year," he said, according to IRNA, predicting that bilateral trade could reach \$3 billion by the end of 2025 if the current growth continues.

According to the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran, the country's trade with Russia

during the first five months of the current Iranian year, which began on March 21, has been on a sharp upward trajectory, with exports approaching the \$1 billion mark — a year-on-year increase of more than 30%.

Also, in another sign of growing economic and trade cooperation, banks in Russia have started processing letters of credit (LC) issued by Iranian banks.



FPRI



By Asgar
Gharemanpoor
Editor-in-chief

INTERVIEW

Professor Hoda Rizk, a distinguished political sociologist and full professor at the Lebanese University, provided Iran Daily with the following expert analysis, shedding light on the complexities behind recent events in the Middle East, including the intense clashes between Iran and Israel, and their far-reaching implications for regional and global security. Professor Rizk's nuanced perspective helps us understand not only the immediate consequences of these conflicts but also the underlying shifts in alliances, strategies, and geopolitical calculations across the Middle East. The imposed "12-day war" of June 2025 marked a significant turning point, dramatically reshaping Iran's deterrence strategy and altering the security architecture that had long defined the region. This conflict overturned established deterrence norms and shattered prior conventions that discouraged open military confrontations, raising the stakes and increasing the likelihood of future escalations. The subsequent missile and drone attacks by Iran, and the US intervention that followed, underscore the fragile balance of power and the volatility of the regional landscape. Professor Rizk also highlights how Israel's actions have influenced the strategic calculus of regional players like Saudi Arabia and Turkey, as well as extra-regional powers such as the United States. The pause in US-brokered normalization talks between Israel and Saudi Arabia reflects the complex dilemmas faced by Riyadh, caught between security interests and public opinion. Meanwhile, Turkey's emergence as a key diplomatic actor in Gaza signals shifting regional alignments. These developments, alongside the ongoing instability involving non-state actors like Hezbollah and Ansarullah (the Houthis), illustrate the multi-layered nature of Middle Eastern security challenges. Looking ahead, the broader confrontation between Tehran and Tel Aviv holds significant implications for global energy security and maritime stability, especially regarding the critical Strait of Hormuz. The future trajectory of the region — whether toward de-escalation or intensified conflict — will depend on various factors, including geopolitical realignments, the role of Western powers, and regional co-operation mechanisms. In light of these complexities, Professor Rizk's insights provide an essential framework for understanding the evolving Middle East, emphasizing the urgency for informed diplomacy and strategic foresight in this pivotal era. We extend our sincere gratitude to Professor Rizk for her invaluable insights into the rapidly evolving security dynamics of the Middle East.

Shifting sands

How Iran-Israel clashes reshape Mideast security architecture, global geopolitics

IRAN DAILY: What do the recent clashes between Iran and Israel reveal about the shifting security architecture in the Middle East?

RIZK: The regional security architecture overturned old deterrence norms and exposed new vulnerabilities. The direct exchange shattered the prior convention of avoiding open military confrontation, raising the stakes and making future conflicts more likely. The 12-day war of June 2025 significantly reshaped Iran's deterrence strategy and regional posture, particularly concerning Israel and the United States. Iran responded with a large-scale missile and drone attack, prompting US intervention.

To what extent has Israel's attack altered the calculations of regional and extra-regional actors, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United States?

Two years after Hamas's attack on Israel in October 2023, Israel's actions have fundamentally reshaped Saudi Arabia's diplomatic calculus. Negotiations for a US-brokered normalization deal between Israel and Saudi Arabia, which were progressing before the conflict, were put on hold. Riyadh now faces a dilemma between its security interests and regional public opinion. Popular anger across the world has grown in response to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, placing pressure on Riyadh to take a more

critical stance toward Israel.

As for Turkey, the conflict enabled it to shift from a diplomatic observer to a central player. Turkey has cemented a new level of influence over Gaza's future diplomatic shift, granting Turkey a direct role in Palestine. The US was instrumental in brokering the October 2025 cease-fire between Israel and Hamas. However, Israel's September 2025 strike on Qatar has challenged the long-held US strategic posture in the Persian Gulf. Regional allies increasingly perceive the US as unable to deter even its friends. However, significant obstacles remain, including Israeli demands and the ongoing instability.

Could the escalation between Tehran and Tel Aviv evolve into a broader regional confrontation involving non-state actors such as Hezbollah or the Houthis?

Yes, it could escalate and evolve into a broader regional confrontation. Hezbollah remains a potent threat with a strong presence in Lebanon. The ongoing truce between Israel and Lebanon, established in November 2024, is fragile and regularly violated by Israeli strikes. Hezbollah refuses to be disarmed, arguing its weapons are essential for resistance. The Houthis in Yemen have actively joined the broader conflict, launching drone and missile attacks on Israel and disrupting international shipping

Hoda Rizk



in the Red Sea. So, the potential for escalation is significant, especially if the ongoing disputes over Hezbollah's disarmament or Houthi attacks are not resolved.

How might the Gaza-Israel agreement influence Iran's diplomatic and strategic maneuvering in the broader Middle East?

Tehran is likely to continue strengthening its relationships with regional neighbors, such as Saudi Arabia, to build diplomatic leverage and counter Israeli influence. It will also continue to support the Palestinian cause as a central tenet of its foreign policy. This helps Tehran sustain its regional support and maintain the image of the Resistance as an anti-Israel movement.

Do the recent developments suggest a decline in US influence in the region, or rather a strategic repositioning of Washington's role?

The US remains the region's security partner, maintains a military presence through bases and naval forces, and manages competition with Russia and China. The latter two countries have expanded their economic and diplomatic ties in the Middle East, for example, by brokering the



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Leaders of Turkey, the United States, Qatar, Jordan, Pakistan, Indonesia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia attend a multilateral meeting during the United Nations General Assembly in New York on September 23, 2025.
● EVAN VUCCI/AP

2023 Iran-Saudi Arabia rapprochement. But the US maintains significant economic interests in the region, particularly related to the free flow of energy and trade. Regional actors, like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, diversify their partnerships but do not cut ties with the US. Despite growing efforts to diversify, Persian Gulf states and others in the region still rely heavily on security guarantees from the US and other Western powers.

In the wake of Israel's attack, how do you assess the prospects for regional security mechanisms independent of Western intervention?
Security prospects for regional security mechanisms independent of Western intervention remain limited due to persistent internal divisions and conflicts of interest. The pursuit of regional security in the Middle East faces several significant hurdles: internal and regional conflicts, as well as persistent power imbalances and Continued reliance on Western security.

What long-term implications might the Iran-Israel confrontation have for global energy security and maritime stability in the Persian Gulf?
The long-term implications of the Iran-Israel confrontation for global energy security and maritime stability are severe, primarily driven by the threats that closing the Strait of Hormuz poses to the regional supply chains. The implications of a prolonged Iran-Israel confrontation also include: a catastrophic price shock,

regional economic devastation, an energy transition paradox partnership, increased targeting of energy infrastructure, increased risk to shipping, diversification of routes and increased congestion, Houthi attacks, and regional spillover.

In your assessment, what key variables will determine whether the region moves toward de-escalation or a new phase of confrontation?

Conflicts can accelerate geopolitical alignments against Western influence, solidifying partnerships among nations like Iran, Russia, and China. Current events have undoubtedly accelerated pragmatic cooperation between Iran, Russia, and China, particularly through military coordination and economic maneuvers to counter Western sanctions. This partnership is based on transactional convenience rather than a commitment to mutual defense.

Pakistan-Saudi strategic pact to pioneer global south extended nuclear deterrence

By Driss Larafi
Professor of Political Science
at Ibn Tofail University

OPINION

On September 17, 2025, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan reached a mutual strategic defence pact, considering any aggression on one is an aggression on both. What is most important to mention is that Pakistan is the only Islamic nuclear-armed country, and the adoption of this agreement occurs in a timely, specific context for a Mideast sprinkled with turbulent periods of crisis and notably, the Israeli air strike on Doha, capital of Qatar.

If Pakistan were not a nuclear power, the pact could have been labelled as a classic mutual defence accord. Even if the issue of a nuclear umbrella has not been formally stipulated, it is an obvious assessment that Pakistan could not help adjust the regional balance of power without its nuclear arsenal. It is out of question that the target is primarily Israel, a nuclear-armed entity with, furthermore, a powerful conventional army in the region. Void of any mention of nuclear security guarantees from Islamabad, certainly, the pact could have secretly addressed this complex issue as, according to analysts, this Pak-Saudi deal formalizes longstanding arrangements between the two countries, at least since the launch of the Pakistani nuclear weapons program in 1972.

However, the statements of the Pakistani officials and, notably, the Defence Minister Khawaja Asif in a Pakistani TV interview underline that this agreement provides a nuclear shield to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), which overall could be intriguing. Allegations have sparked amongst observers, who argue that the nuclear factor could not be missing. Another reason moves this speculation to reality: Pakistan is poised to defend with nukes the holy sites of Mecca and Medina, giving them some credibility for a country bound to be an existentially Muslim state.

Interestingly, if Pakistan actually extends its nuclear deterrent to secure the KSA, it would be the first time in the Nuclear Era that a “new nuclear nation,” indeed, from the Global South, postures extended nuclear deterrence to an ally in the region. Together with Libya, the KSA had largely funded the Pakistani nuclear program at the outset in the 1970s. Yet, it is still unclear whether Pakistanis have pledged to move nukes to KSA's territory, keep them at home, or simply, in return, benefit the Saudis from a nuclear umbrella.

In this respect, some open sources convey that as gratitude for their financing of the Pakistani nuclear program, the Saudis might have been considered an actual nuclear-armed state.

Republican Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene from the US intelligence subcommittee of the Congress testified in 2013 that “Saudi Arabia has nuclear weapons,” even if, until now, there has been no confirmation either from the US government or from Saudi officials. Moreover, a Senior NATO official recognized that he learned from intelligence reports that some Pakistan-made nu-



● BEN JONES/THE ECONOMIST

clear weapons were bound to be delivered to Riyadh. Also, the former head of Israeli military intelligence Amos Yadlin told a conference in Sweden in October 2013 that “Saudis will not wait one month. They already paid for the bomb. They will go to Pakistan and bring what they need to bring.”

Most strikingly, Gary Samore, a US nuclear expert and counter-proliferation adviser to former president Barack Obama, stated plainly the following: “I do think that the Saudis believe they have some understanding with Pakistan that, in extremis, they have claimed to acquire nuclear weapons from Pakistan.” The Saudis have already acquired in 1987 from China several MRBM-medium-range ballistic missiles, the DF-3A (CSS-2 for NATO's standard), regarded as nuclear-capable delivery systems. Saudi Arabia paraded the missile for the first time in 2014 and recently modernized it. Additionally, as a gratitude, retired Pakistani General Feroz Hassan Khan stated in his book

“Eating Grass,” Saudi funds helped Pakistan sustain its nuclear program under international sanctions. For their part, a Saudi official declared that “this is a comprehensive agreement that encompasses all military means.”

During the last few decades, when Pakistan was facing turmoil and domestic instability, some observers hinted at the possibility that Pakistani authorities were eyeing to hand over nukes to Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, the Saudis might have a strong incentive to welcome Pakistani nuclear warheads, being threatened by Israel.

As the leader of the GCC, the KSA might have been heavily humiliated as it couldn't defend its small partners and neighbours and even its airspace being outrageously violated by Israel during the recent air strike. Consequently, this Doha air strike SHOULD be considered as a watershed and a milestone, ushering in a game changer and harbouring a new regional order; an actual dynamic shift in the balance of power in the Mid-

dle East, creating what some observers have called a new regional order.

Until now, the world, and notably the UN and its watchdog, the IAEA, has been constantly tackling only one “strategic ambiguity” in connection with the Israeli nuclear program. Now, to be suddenly flooded with the emergence of another “strategic fog” with the Pak-Saudi pact, it spurs a nuclear arms race and kills the longstanding perspective of a nuclear weapon-free zone (NWFZ) in the Mideast.

Notwithstanding, the U-turn associated with this nuclear umbrella — as was the case in the 1950s in Europe when the USA deployed 7,000 nuclear weapons — a fresh impetus is given to the re-emergence of nuclear dissemination (vertical proliferation) in the Middle East. It enables Riyadh to have full command of the nuclear fuel cycle, ending up at least as “a threshold country” or ambitiously eyeing the possession of a “token nuclear force,” a “bomb in the basement” or more ostensibly a “credible nuclear arsenal”.

In the end, the result could certainly be positive for the nuclear world order, compelling Israel either to uncover its possession of its nuclear arsenal and establish an NWFZ in the area, which is continuously called for by the UNGA, or at least opening up a Mutual assured destruction (MAD) with a balance of terror. This new security environment will assuredly deter Israel from its behaviour and state of nature policy. After all, si vis pacem para bellum [=If you want peace, prepare for war]. The Cold War Era was more stabilizing and peaceful despite some “seismic” nuclear crises. If we draw lessons from the Ukraine conflict, particularly its nuclear dimension, Israel couldn't dare dream any more to show its muscles relentlessly throughout the zone, and will merely find itself confined to operate in its tiny, crowded area, along the western coast of Mandatory Palestine, particularly with the awesome worldwide diplomatic victory of Palestine statehood at UNGA.



● Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (R) embraces Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif following the signing of the Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on September 17, 2025.
● SPA



It is still unclear if Pakistanis have pledged to extend their nuclear deterrence and, if so, whether they will move nukes to KSA's territory, keep them at home, or simply, in return, benefit the Saudis from a nuclear umbrella.

In this respect, some open sources convey that as gratitude for their financing of the Pakistani nuclear program, the Saudis might have been considered an actual nuclear-armed state.

The full article first appeared on Eurasia Review.

Farrokhi, Hedayati cruise to Greco-Roman glory at U23 Worlds



Iran's Gholamreza Farrokhi celebrates after winning the Greco-Roman 87kg gold at the U23 Wrestling World Championships in Novi Sad, Serbia, on Oct. 21, 2025.
● UWW



Greco-Roman wrestler Fardin Hedayati celebrates with the Iranian flag after claiming the 130kg gold medal at the U23 Wrestling World Championships in Novi Sad, Serbia, on Oct. 21, 2025.
● UWW

Sports Desk

There seems to be no slowing down to Iran's global dominance in Greco-Roman wrestling, as the country looks poised to complete a clean sweep of world team titles across all age groups. Having already lifted the U17, U20, and senior trophies earlier in 2025, Iran began its title defense at the U23 World Championships with double gold med-

als across four weight classes in Novi Sad, Serbia, on Tuesday. Gholamreza Farrokhi – a gold medalist on his debut at the Senior Worlds in September – and defending world under-23 champion Fardin Hedayati who celebrated his birthday as well on Tuesday, claimed the ultimate prize in emphatic fashion at 87kg and 130kg respectively. "I was able to win two back-to-back tough matches at the World

Championships and bring home two gold medals," Farrokhi said. "These were high-level competitions." Farrokhi, a gold medalist at 82kg in Zagreb, moved up to 87kg for Novi Sad but had no troubles in switching weights. As he did in Zagreb, Farrokhi brought his best game in par terre and rolled to his second gold in one month after a 9-0 victory in the final against Ukraine's Ivan Chmyr,

his fifth technical superiority victory. After being put on top in par terre, Farrokhi launched a trap-arm gut and turned Chmyr four times for the win. Ukraine threw one of those ever-increasing challenges for no reason but lost it to add one more point to Farrokhi's score. "When you move up a weight class, the opponents are definitely stronger and tougher,"

Farrokhi said. "It was a good experience, and it gave me a better sense of how I can perform at the Olympic 87 kg class," added the Iranian, who scored 44 points, conceding only one, across five bouts. Hedayati, who has not lost an international bout since his final loss at the U20 Worlds in 2022, was again in a league of his own in the superheavyweight event, outscoring his opponents 30-0

across four bouts. Up against Armenian Razmik Kurdyan in the final, Hedayati began with takedown on the edge for two points. Kurdyan was put in par terre and from there Hedayati turned him twice to extend his lead to 7-0. With just 23 seconds left before the break, Hedayati scored a stepout to finish the final 8-0 and claim his second straight U23 world title.

Jafari hails Iran's 'dedication' as Didar double sinks India



Iran's Sara Didar (20) celebrates after scoring during a 2-0 win against India in Shillong, India, on Oct. 21, 2025.
● FOOTBALL360

Sports Desk

Iran women's head coach Marziyeh Jafari said her players deserve credit for putting in "a dedicated performance" after Sara Didar's second-half brace sealed a 2-0 victory over host India at the Tri-Nation Women's International Friendlies in Shillong on Tuesday. Iran was composed, physically superior on the ball, and dictated the rhythm of the game almost from the outset. Jafari's girls, who stepped onto the pitch at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium on the back of an exhausting 29 hours of flight, grew in confidence, stringing together flowing moves, while India struggled to build anything meaningful in the final third. Still, Iran had to wait until the second half to break the

deadlock, with Didar coming off the bench to make the difference with double strikes in the space of 10 minutes. An unmarked Zahra Qanbari rose to head against the crossbar Didar acrobatically smashed home the rebound in the 64th minute. India's Nongmaithem Ratanbala Devi then misjudged the bounce of a routine clearance at the top of the box, allowing Didar to snatch the ball and rifle a low strike past the goalkeeper. "Thank God, we got through that game well. The players took to the pitch with immense focus and motivation and gave their heart and soul. This victory is a testament to girls' hard work and passion," Jafari said after the game. "India is a strong side, both technically and physically, and playing against them is always

tough. However, my players stuck to the gameplan to dictate the tempo and their decision-making was exceptional when it mattered most," added the newly-crowned Asian Women's Coach of the Year. On how the long trip affected her team in the buildup to the game, Jafari said: "It definitely took a physical toll on the squad. An extra day for recovery and preparation would have made for a more ideal start to the competition. But credit to the players – they fought through the fatigue and delivered a dedicated performance, which speaks volumes about their character." Next up for Jafari and her team in the tournament is a game against Nepal on Friday. "Our objective here goes beyond just results; we also want to improve the cohesion between our lines and enhance the players' international experience. These games are a valuable opportunity for a tactical assessment of the team, and fortunately, our performance is on an upward trajectory and I just hope the players can keep up the momentum against Nepal," Jafari said. Iran is preparing for next March's AFC Women's Asian Cup in Australia, where Jafari's girls will face the host, South Korea and the Philippines in Group A.

Asian Men's Handball Championship: Iran coach Guijosa confident despite 'toughest group'

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Rafael Guijosa Castillo remains confident despite his team being drawn into "the toughest group" at the Asian Men's Handball Championship. The 22nd edition of the sport's flagship continental event will get underway on January 15 in Kuwait, with Iran – bronze medalist in 2014 – set to take on Japan, Saudi Arabia, and Australia in Group D.



● ALI ARSHADI/IRIHF

Japan, a two-time Asian champion, was beaten by Qatar in the 2024 final, while four-time bronze medalist Saudi Arabia has reached the semifinals six times in the past nine editions. "There's no doubt we've been placed in the toughest group, though we must respect every team in this tournament. Still,

everyone on the team genuinely believes we can achieve a positive result in Kuwait," Guijosa told the official website of the Iranian Handball Federation. On assessing Iran's opponents in the group stage, the Spaniard said: "We don't have much specific information on Australia. All I know is that, like Qatar, they utilize multinational players. Japan is now considered a title contender, just like Qatar, and their ulti-

"Both we and Saudi Arabia are determined to advance from this group. That's why I'm saying we are competing in the toughest group of the tournament," added the former IHF Player of the Year, who took over the Iran job for a second spell last year, replacing Montenegrin Veselin Vujovic. When asked about his team's preparation for the continental showpiece, Guijosa replied: "We began our preparation process a long time ago. We also have an excellent opportunity at the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh [starting November 7] where we will face some strong teams. Furthermore, we will be participating in a top-notch tournament in Tunisia in the coming days. "The tournament in Tunisia is highly important as it allows me to assess the players. It will also be a crucial opportunity to gather information on Kuwait, which will be one of our main rivals in the Asian Championship. "We have time to get into our best form before the Asian Championship. With the solid planning we will have in place, we are going to Kuwait to achieve the best possible results," Guijosa added. The 15-team tournament will also serve as the Asian qualifiers for the 2027 IHF Men's World Championship, with the four semifinalists securing a spot in the global showpiece in Germany.

Iran names futsal squad for Islamic Solidarity Games

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Vahid Shamsaei named a provisional 17-man squad for the men's futsal event at the upcoming Islamic Solidarity Games – starting November

7 in Riyadh. Three players will be omitted from the provisional list before the team heads to the Saudi capital. Recently-crowned AFC Player of the Year Salar Aqapour and fellow nominee Mos-

lem Oladqobad will be back to spearhead the Iranian roster – along with prolific pivots Hossein Tayyebi and Saeid Ahmadabbasi – at the sixth edition of the multi-sport event, after the duo missed last week's friendly

doubleheader against Russia due to participation at the AFC Awards. Iran played to a 1-1 draw against Russia last Tuesday before suffering a 5-2 defeat in the second game in the Russian city of Tula two days

later. The men's futsal event will be among the most highly anticipated in Riyadh, as six of the eight participating teams – Iran, Morocco, Libya, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan – featured at last year's Futsal World Cup.

The following is Iran's provisional list for Riyadh 2025: Baqer Mohammadi, Behzad Rasouli, Mahdi Rostamiha, Hossein Sabzi, Mohammadhossein Derakhshani, Mahdi Asadshir, Amirhossein

Gholami, Salar Aqapour, Mohammadhossein Bazay, Ali Khalilvand, Moslem Oladqobad, Mahdi Karimi, Sajjad Yousefkhah, Masoud Yousef, Hossein Tayyebi, Saeid Ahamadabbasi, Behrouz Azimi.

Ancient windmills of Nashtifan face modern threats

Iranica Desk

In a remote corner of Khorasan Razavi Province, in the region of Nashtifan near Khaf, stand the world's oldest windmills — silent witnesses to centuries of human ingenuity. Once proud symbols of the grandeur and creativity of Iranian architecture, these ancient structures now face serious threats from urban expansion and unregulated construction.

A researcher and expert on historical monuments told ISNA that the rapid growth of urbanization endangers the Nashtifan windmills — the largest of their kind in the world — noting that unchecked city expansion has created a significant risk to their preservation and authenticity.

Alireza Yavari emphasized that the Nashtifan windmills are far from ordinary buildings; rather, they are living testaments to the engineering brilliance and mastery of ancient Iranians in harnessing natural forces. "These structures, dating back to the Safavid era, were built from mud, clay, and wood," he said. "They reveal how our ancestors ingeniously used wind — this invisible yet powerful element — to grind grain and sustain daily life."

He elaborated on the distinctive architectural design of the windmills, explaining that their structure allows them to capture and utilize the region's strong seasonal winds with remarkable efficiency. In this respect, they represent a brilliant example of environmental adaptation and sustainable energy use, unparalleled in the history of Iranian architecture. Yavari further described their design, saying that each windmill is a two-story structure, with the main milling chamber located on the ground floor and the large wheels and blades positioned above. Storage compartments for grain were also incorporated into the design, reflecting the careful and prac-



IRNA



iranwonders.com

tical planning that underpinned these remarkable constructions. "Each windmill typically consists of eight small chambers," Yavari noted, "each equipped with six movable blades. When the wind blows, the blades rotate, setting the millstones in motion. The overall height of each structure reaches nearly 20 meters, enabling them to harness wind power with impressive efficiency." He continued, "One of the most fascinating elements of their design is a mechanism known as the Takht-e Vahshat — or 'Board of Fear.' This device functions as an advanced braking system, capable of stopping the millstones when necessary. Its presence

demonstrates the builders' remarkable understanding of safety and control in the milling process." Yavari stressed that this level of engineering reflects the deep knowledge of ancient Iranians in adapting to their environment's geographical and climatic conditions. The windmills of Nashtifan, he said, are recognized not only at the national level but also globally as a masterpiece of cultural and historical heritage. He added that given the region's unique climatic conditions, ancient Iranians designed and constructed various types of windmills that, beyond their economic function, stand out for their use of clean, renewable



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energy. According to Yavari, research indicates that around 208 windmills have been identified in the Khaf— 34 in Nashtifan, 30 in Khaf, and 28 in Barabad. To safeguard this invaluable heritage, all these windmills were inscribed on Iran's National Heritage List in 2002. He emphasized that promoting these structures globally and achieving international recognition should be a key priority for the cultural heritage sector. In recent years, the Nashtifan windmills have drawn growing attention from both domestic and foreign tourists. "According to available reports," Yavari said, "between 2,000 and 3,000 people visit the site an-

nually. This trend has created a valuable opportunity for regional economic development and the growth of the local tourism industry." Yavari added that these windmills can serve as a central attraction for introducing Iranian history and culture to visitors. "Such tourism not only strengthens the local economy," he explained, "but also provides a meaningful way to preserve and pass on our cultural heritage to future generations." He noted that the growth of tourism in Nashtifan has created a space for cultural exchange and a deeper understanding of Iran's history. Visitors gain firsthand insight into traditional

methods of grain milling and experience a tangible connection with the lifestyles and ingenuity of people from the past. "This experience," Yavari said, "is not only fascinating for visitors but also offers the local community a chance to present their native culture, contributing both to economic growth and to the preservation of regional identity." Despite all this potential, Yavari warned that unchecked urban development threatens the physical and historical integrity of the site. Official data, he noted, show that a significant percentage of the windmills are at risk due to neglect and both human and environmental factors. "The preservation of these structures," he stressed, "is not merely an administrative duty — it is a moral and cultural responsibility." Yavari noted that the Nashtifan windmills can serve as enduring symbols of sustainability and harmony with nature, inspiring contemporary society. "They remind us," he said, "how our ancestors built better lives by using natural resources wisely and adapting to their surroundings." He emphasized that protecting the windmills and developing them as tourist destinations could lead to the sustainable growth of the region. Given their cultural and architectural appeal, he proposed that facilities such as guesthouses, visitor centers, and informational offices be established to enhance tourism, boost the local economy, and improve the quality of life for residents. Finally, Yavari suggested that developing tourism in this region could increase local income by 20 to 30 percent. Moreover, if the Nashtifan windmills are effectively introduced to international audiences, the number of visitors could easily double, further solidifying their role as one of Iran's most extraordinary living legacies.

Escape to Gahar Lake to reconnect with nature



Gahar Lake, one of the most beautiful highland lakes of Iran, is located within the Oshtorankuh Protected Zone in Lorestan Province at an elevation of 2,400 meters above sea level. Gahar consists of two parts: Upper Gahar (the smaller one) and Lower Gahar (the larger one). This natural lake was formed by the melting snow of Oshtorankuh Mountain and the accumulation of water behind a natural dam created by

landslides. The constant inflow of water causes the lake to overflow into the lower basin, forming the main Gahar Lake, according to visitiran.ir. Gahar Lake resembles a crystal-clear pond, nourished by mountain springs, waterfalls, and natural wells. Its water level remains relatively stable throughout the year, though most of its surface freezes during the cold winter months. The lake's shores vary in tex-

ture — sandy along the western and eastern parts, and rocky elsewhere — adding to its diverse landscape. Surrounded by the majestic Oshtorankuh Mountain, the region boasts a rich variety of flora and fauna, including groves, colorful wildflowers, and rare species such as Fritillaries, all contributing to the breathtaking scenery. Activities such as mountain climbing, hook fishing, swimming, boating, waterskiing,



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wildlife observation, and river hiking make this region an exceptional destination for nature and adventure enthusiasts alike. In addition to its natural beauty, Gahar Lake holds cultural and environmental significance; it is often referred to as the "Jewel of Oshtorankuh" and serves as a symbol of ecological harmony, attracting travelers, researchers, and photographers who seek inspiration in its serene and untouched wilderness.

The lake is also considered a haven for relaxation and meditation, offering visitors a rare opportunity to disconnect from urban life and reconnect with nature's rhythm. The calm, mirror-like surface of the water reflects the surrounding peaks and clouds, creating an almost dreamlike landscape, especially during sunrise and sunset. Each season paints the area in a different hue — spring brings blossoms and fresh greenery,

summer offers vibrant life and accessible trails, autumn cloaks the forests in warm colors, and winter transforms the region into a silent, snow-covered paradise. With its combination of pristine nature, peaceful ambiance, and ecological diversity, Gahar Lake continues to be one of Iran's most treasured natural landmarks — a place where the harmony between mountain, water, and wilderness captures the essence of untouched beauty.

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+98 21 84711225
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+98 21 88548892-5
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From Radif to resonance, allure of Persian music in West

 **By Alireza Sepahvand**
Journalist

PERSPECTIVE EXCLUSIVE

In recent decades, Iranian music has crossed geographical and cultural borders to find audiences in Europe and the United States. From Mohammad-Reza Shajarian's concerts in Los Angeles to Hossein Alizadeh's performances and Kayhan Kalhor's collaborations with Western ensembles, and the growing popularity of artists such as Sohrab Pournazeri or modern electronic fusions rooted in Persian music — all show that the Western ear, despite profound cultural differences, is somehow enchanted by this sound.

But where does this attraction come from? What makes a listener in Paris or New York feel a sense of closeness and excitement when hearing the timbre of Tar (long-necked lute), Kamancheh (an Iranian spiked fiddle), or a Persian vocal performance?

Desire for Novelty, 'the Other'

One of the main reasons Western listeners are drawn to Iranian music is its sense of freshness and otherness. In a world where Western pop music has become largely homogenized and predictable, the unfamiliar intervals, irregular rhythms, and unique timbres of Persian instruments create a surprising and refreshing experience.

Iranian music, with its modal structure (the system of Dastgahs and Gushehs) and microtonal intervals, gently challenges the Western ear — as if it were hearing a new language of emotion.

In fact, this difference functions as a form of Exoticism — that long-standing Western fascination with the mystery of the East. Just as 19th-century European painters were inspired by Oriental imagery, today's listeners seek new colors and emotional nuances in Middle Eastern, particularly Iranian, music.

Intervals, modes connect East, West

One of the most fundamental differences between Iranian and Western classical music lies in their systems of intervals and modes.

Iranian music is built on the Radif — a modal system composed of several Dastgahs (modes) and Gushehs (melodic fragments), each with its own tonal character, emotional color, and internal logic.

By contrast, Western classical music is based on major and minor scales and the equal division of the octave into twelve semitones (Equal Temperament), which gives it a sense of symmetry and predictability. In Persian music, however,

the intervals are subtler and more nuanced. The presence of microtones (quarter tones) between notes — absent from the Western system — creates a fluid and expressive quality, a sense of sliding and emotional flexibility. For the Western ear, these sounds may at first seem strange, but soon become deeply moving.

For example, the minor third in the Dastgah-e Shur is slightly smaller than the Western minor third, giving the mode a melancholic yet luminous feeling — unlike the darker, more rigid sadness of the Western minor scale.

Moreover, while Western scales remain fixed and repetitive, Persian music allows for modulation within a performance, with the Shahed (tonal center) and Ist (cadence) gradually shifting as the musician moves through different Gushehs.

This evolving tonality creates a sense of inner narration and emotional journey for Western listeners — as if the music flows not through harmonic progression, but through the transformation of spirit.

Interestingly, many 20th-century Western composers — Debussy, Messiaen, Bartók — also turned toward modal and non-equal temperaments for inspiration. In that sense, Persian music represents, for them, a return to the natural roots of sound and free modal expression.

Thus, the Western ear experiences Iranian intervals as something both new and familiar with new in tone and color, familiar in emotion and expression.

Spirituality, inner reflection

In the fast-paced modern world, Persian music — with its emphasis on contemplation, silence, and introspection — offers a rare sense of calm. Traditional Persian singing, often set to the poetry of Rumi, Hafez, or Saadi, carries a deeply spiritual dimension.

Even for a Western listener unfamiliar with the language, the tone and delivery convey a distinctly mystical feeling. As Kayhan Kalhor once said, "Even if the listener doesn't understand a single word of the poem, they still feel the emotion." Through long sustained notes, slow improvisations, and open sonic spaces, this music detaches the mind from external noise — offering the same serenity many Westerners seek in meditation or new-age music.

Technique, improvisation in dialogue with freedom

Another element that captivates Western listeners is the role of improvisation.

In Western music, improvisation survives mainly in genres like jazz, where audiences al-



ready appreciate its spontaneity. When an Iranian musician like Kalhor or Alizadeh creates music in the moment, that living creativity feels deeply authentic and exciting.

Improvisation in Persian music is a kind of dialogue — between the musician and the instrument, between tradition and the present moment. This contrasts sharply with Western classical music, which generally relies on fixed, written structures. To the Western ear, such performances embody life and freedom: a direct, emotional communication rather than a repetition of pre-composed notes.

Universal language of emotion

Though the Persian musical system is complex and deeply rooted in tradition, the emotions it conveys are universal — sorrow, longing, love, spirituality. These are expressed through tone and inflection rather than words.

For instance, Shajarian's voice can move a French listener who doesn't understand Persian, simply through its sorrow, beauty, and grandeur.

Persian music thus becomes a bridge of shared humanity. When the sound of the Ney (end-blown flute) or Kamancheh rises plaintively, the listener, regardless of language or culture, connects it to their own experiences of love and loss.

Cross-cultural collaborations bridge two worlds

Since the 1980s, Iranian musicians have engaged in fruitful collaborations with interna-

tional artists. Kayhan Kalhor's works with the Kronos Quartet, or his performances with Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble (which won a Grammy Award), as well as his "Ghazal" project with Shujaat Husain Khan, are among the most prominent examples.

These collaborations introduced Persian music to Western audiences through familiar formats and ensembles, creating a kind of cultural translation — preserving authenticity while making communication possible.

Instruments showcase East unique sound

Traditional Iranian instruments — Tar, Setar, Santur, Kamancheh, and Ney — produce timbres that sound both unusual and poetic to Western ears. Their tone lies somewhere between roughness and delicacy, as if resonating from the depths of history.

In Western orchestras, each instrument serves a specific technical role, but in Persian music, the instrument sings. The Ney, with its sighing breath, or the kamancheh, with its human-like tremor, convey a deeply personal emotion that stands apart from the polished, studio-produced sounds of modern Western music.

The growing global interest in acoustic and organic sound textures has further increased appreciation for these instruments.

Poetry, philosophy reveal culture's hidden depth

Persian music is inseparable from poetry. The verses of Rumi, Hafez, Khayyam, and

Saadi, often sung in traditional performances, carry profound philosophical and mystical meanings. Even when Western audiences don't understand the language, the translated texts or general concepts deeply move them.

Themes such as divine love, transcendence, unity of being, and the impermanence of the world are universal. Thus, Persian music is not merely sound — it is a vessel of thought and reflection.

Reflections in media, academia

In recent decades, Iranian music has become a serious field of study in Western academia. Courses on Tar, Daf, and Persian vocal music are now offered at institutions like UCLA and universities in London. Numerous scholarly articles and ethnomusicological documentaries have explored the Dastgah and maqam systems, showing that Persian music appeals not only to the ear but also to the intellect.

Global media have increasingly highlighted Iranian artists, while digital platforms like YouTube, Spotify, and Instagram have made their works more accessible to international audiences.

Human authenticity, emotional sincerity

Many Western listeners sense a rare honesty in Persian music. There is no theatrical "showmanship" in the Hollywood sense — only direct emotional expression.

This is why live performances by artists such as Alizadeh,

Kalhor, or Pournazeri — without elaborate visual effects or digital enhancements — can be profoundly moving.

Here, music is not a commercial product but a manifestation of the soul. For Western audiences weary of cultural consumerism, this authenticity is precious.

Globalization, search for shared identity

In an age of globalization, cultural borders are fading. Western youth, particularly newer generations, seek to understand non-Western cultures. For them, Iranian music is not merely a listening experience but a cultural journey — a journey into a poetic and spiritual past.

At the same time, young Iranian musicians abroad are blending traditional roots with contemporary genres such as electronic or jazz, making Persian music more globally resonant. This fusion of tradition and modernity forms a bridge between worlds, showing that beauty can indeed be a universal language.

The appeal of Iranian music to Western audiences can be summed up in three words: difference, depth, and sincerity. Structurally, it differs from what the Western ear is accustomed to; emotionally and spiritually, it offers greater depth; and humanly, it speaks with unfiltered honesty.

In a world where much of music has become a consumable product, Persian music reminds us that sound can carry a soul. Perhaps that is why, whenever the Ney or kamancheh echoes in Western ears, it awakens something timeless — a feeling born of history, love, and humanity.