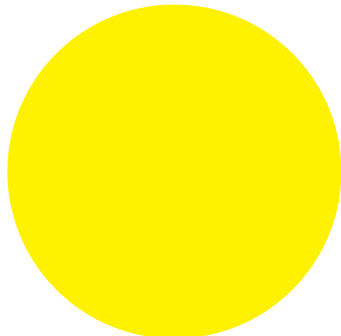




Iran
advancing
despite many
challenges:
Leader

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Pezeshkian slams world powers for granting Israel 'special right' for aggression

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World leaders, including Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (front 4th R), pose for a group photo as they attend an international conference on "Peace and Trust" in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan on December 12, 2025.

president.ir



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Iraq's freeze-and-reversal of resistance assets underscores push for neutrality

By Delaram Ahmadi
Staff writer

INTERVIEW



The Asset Freezing Committee at Iraq's Central Bank has reversed its earlier decision and removed names linked to Lebanon's Hezbollah and Yemen's Ansarallah (Houthis) from its asset-blocking list. The committee had placed both groups on the roster of "terrorist groups," a designation published in Iraq's Official Gazette on November 17. Following the controversy, Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani ordered an immediate investigation into the decision. According to the prime minister's office, Iraq has agreed only to Malaysia's re-

quest to freeze assets connected to Daesh (ISIS) and al-Qaeda. This designation and its swift annulment come as the Iraqi government faces mounting US and Western pressure to dismantle armed groups broadly labeled as "resistance groups." Speaking to Iran Daily, Mideast affairs analyst Ali Bidboo explained the background and implications of the decision and its withdrawal. He noted that although the move was not accidental — and was made under Western pressure before being reversed under domestic pressure — neither the implementation nor the reversal is likely to bring about any major shift in Iraq-Western relations. According to him, a post-war Iraq in need of reconstruction will continue its attempt to walk a fine line and preserve neutrality between the West and its regional adversaries.

IRAN DAILY: What was the background

behind the Asset Freezing Committee's decision? Was it simply an administrative error, or was it taken under political and international pressure on Iraq? BIDBOO: Legally speaking, the designation of terrorism in Iraq is carried out by the country's National Security Council (NSC). In practice, if Hezbollah or the Houthis were to be added to Iraq's terrorist list, the NSC would have to convene, review the matter, and formally approve adding both groups. Only then would the designation become official. The point — as reflected in media coverage — is that it was claimed these two groups had been added to Iraq's terrorist list, but that was not the case. Any group that might be included on Iraq's terrorist list must first go through the NSC, whose members include the interior minister, the defense minister, and senior-ranking security officials, just as in any other state. Therefore, even before the reversal, it must be clarified that neither of the two groups

had been added to Iraq's terrorist list. Instead, they had been placed on a list of "supporters of terrorism" or "terrorism financiers." Nevertheless, the move was not accidental. Being placed on a list overseen by the Terrorist Financing Committee, which operates under the Central Bank, does not constitute a legal designation, because the committee's own reference point is UN Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001), issued a few weeks after the 9/11 attacks. If Hezbollah and the Houthis were to appear alongside al-Qaeda and Daesh on that committee's list, Iraq would first have had to officially declare them terrorist organizations — something it did not do. This indicates that Iraq was under significant US pressure, prompting the government to place the two groups on that list. Yet the massive public backlash, especially in southern Iraqi cities, and the government's reluctance to face renewed protests forced it to backtrack almost immediately.

Besides, Iraq's prime minister stated in his last interview that the move was meant to "undermine his government" and prevent him from securing another term. Since the two groups were never added to Iraq's official terrorist list, the measure had no legal basis. It only aimed to reduce US pressure on the Central Bank of Iraq. How will this reversal affect Iraq's relations with the United States and other Western countries? Could it be interpreted as a sign of Baghdad's autonomy, or might it fuel new tensions? In the late Biden administration, Washington had been ramping up pressure on Baghdad. The governor of Iraq's Central Bank had repeatedly traveled to the US, while American officials frequently met with him and with Iraq's prime minister to discuss the financing of resistance groups. These meetings intensified after the events of October 7.

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Pezeshkian slams world powers for granting Israel 'special right' for aggression

Iran, Russia stress implementation of strategic partnership pact

International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Friday that the policies of major powers in West Asia created "a special right" for Israel, a situation which had enabled the regime to pursue military aggression across the region, including on Iran, without facing meaningful international consequences.

"In the environment of existing discrimination and inequality, the policy of major powers in West Asia has in practice created a special privilege for the Zionist regime," Pezeshkian said in an address to the International Conference on Peace and Trust in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. "This privilege has been the source of many wars and injustices in the region."

Pezeshkian said the roots of conflicts were not military but structures, shaped by global systems that favor powerful nations at the expense of weaker ones.

"Wars are not sudden events," he said. "They are the product of selfishness and a sense of superiority. They take root in unjust global economic structures, in institutions that amplify the voices of the powerful and silence the weak, and in legal regimes that make justice conditional on the will of major powers," he added.

Such a system, Pezeshkian said, has turned peace into "a privilege limited to certain geographies" rather than a universal right.

The Iranian president said that a combination of geopolitical calcu-



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (c) addresses the International Conference on Peace and Trust in Turkmenistan's capital of Ashgabat on December 12, 2025.
● president.ir

lations, Western security interests and the failures of international institutions had contributed to Israel's sense of impunity.

On the sidelines of the conference, the Iranian president held separate meetings with the leaders of the countries participating in the event.

Iran-Russia relations

During his meeting with Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, Pezeshkian expressed Tehran's determination to implement an agreement on a comprehensive strategic partnership with Russia signed in January.

"Joint cooperation, particularly in the fields of power generation, transportation, and transit corridors, is currently being pursued. Regarding the [North-South] corridor, Iran will fully prepare the grounds for the project's implementation by the end of the year," he added.

Pezeshkian also described agricultural cooperation between the two countries as highly beneficial, say-

ing the model could be expanded to other sectors as well.

Putin, for his part, said that Russia-Iran relations were "developing very positively."

He noted that the two countries were discussing ties in the field of gas and electricity, and working closely on Iran's nuclear issue.

"Moscow and Tehran are cooperating in various areas, including the Bushehr nuclear power plant and infrastructure development projects, such as the North-South corridor," he added.

Putin said trade between Russia and Iran increased by 13% last year, and by another 8% this year.

Economic relations with Iraq, Pakistan

In a meeting with Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, the two leaders emphasized the follow-up of the agreements finalized during a recent Pezeshkian's visit to Islamabad.

The president also discussed a range of issues, especially economic relations, with his Iraqi counterpart Abdul Latif Rashid.

"Joint investment and the development of border communications are among our priorities, Pezeshkian said as he emphasized the necessity of connecting Iranian and Iraqi businessmen, universities, and industries.

"We have given special authority to the governors of border provinces to use the vast existing capacities to increase trade."

Need for fostering trust, peace

In a meeting with Turkmenistan's National Leader Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, Pezeshkian called for fostering trust, peace, and solidarity among nations in today's world. "Today's world, more than ever before, is in need of building trust, peace, and solidarity among nations, and the initiative you have pioneered reflects a profound understanding of the realities of our time," he said.

He also expressed hope that Turkmenistan's approach would extend to the region and beyond to promote regional peace and security.

The Turkmen leader, for his part, noted that the complexity of the current global situation required increased dialogue and consultations. Praising excellent Turkmenistan-Iran relations, particularly in trade, culture, and humanitarian efforts, Berdimuhamedov hoped for closer bilateral ties in the future.

Iran advancing despite many challenges: *Leader*



Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei addresses a ceremony marking the birth anniversary of Fatima al-Zahra (PBUH), the daughter of Islam's Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), in Tehran on Dec. 11, 2025.
● khamenei.ir

Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said on Thursday that despite enormous shortages and challenges facing Iran, the nation was "moving, striving, and advancing" through the steadfastness, sincerity, and justice-seeking of its people.

"The shortages and problems across the country are many, but the nation, day by day, with perseverance, sincerity, goodness, and pursuit of justice, creates honor and strength for Islam and Iran, and by God's grace, the country is moving, striving, and advancing," Ayatollah Khamenei said at a ceremony marking the birth anniversary of Fatima al-Zahra (PBUH), the daughter of Islam's Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

The Leader touched on a "broad media and propaganda campaign" against Iran after the June military aggression by Israel and the US against Iran.

"Today, beyond the military clashes we have witnessed, we are in the center of a propaganda and media war with a broad enemy front," he said. "The enemy has realized that this property, land, and spiritual homeland cannot be subdued and occupied through military pressure."

Ayatollah Khamenei said the enemy's "line, danger, and goal" was to erase the effects, goals, and concepts of the Islamic Revolution.

The US, the Leader said, was "at the center of this wide and active front," with some European countries surrounding it and domestic mercenaries and traitors residing in Europe seeking personal gain on the periphery. He noted that resisting Western media campaigns was "difficult but entirely possible."

Highlighting Iranian resilience, Ayatollah Khamenei said: "The people of Iran, through national resistance, have thwarted ongoing efforts by the enemy to change the religious, historical, and cultural identity of the nation."

He cited provocations and propaganda by Western media actors and political-military leaders as instances of the enemy's propaganda pressure, noting that the pressure was often aimed at "territorial expansion, — like what the US does in Latin America — control of underground resources, changing lifestyles, and, most importantly, identity transformation."

The Leader also reflected on a century of foreign attempts to undermine Iran's identity.

Iran seeks 'new chapter' in ties with Lebanon, FM says

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Thursday that Iran was seeking a "new chapter" in bilateral relations with Lebanon after his Lebanese counterpart said Beirut was in "full readiness to establish a new era of constructive relations with Iran based on mutual respect."

Tensions between Tehran and Beirut have increased in recent months over Lebanon's decision to disarm Hezbollah resistance group under pressure from Israel and the United States.

In a post published on X, Araghchi said that he was "bemused" by his Lebanese counterpart's decision not to accept Tehran's invitation for an official visit.

The top diplomat noted that while he was grateful for Youssef Raggi's "kind invitation,"



Abbas Araghchi
● IRNA

there was no need for "a neutral venue" for talks between countries with "brotherly and full diplomatic relations."

The Iranian foreign minister added he understood why Raggi was not prepared to travel to Tehran, citing Israel's occupation and violations of a cease-

fire.

"Hence I will gladly accept his invitation to come to Beirut," he said.

Lebanon's foreign minister had earlier apologized for declining the Tehran visit, saying the refusal "does not mean rejecting dialogue," but that "suitable con-

ditions" for such a meeting were not currently available.

Raggi then proposed a bilateral meeting in a "neutral third country" agreeable to both sides.

In an interview with Al Jazeera on Friday, Raggi reiterated that Beirut was open to dialogue with Tehran "provided that it stops interfering in our internal affairs."

Iran has repeatedly rejected accusations of interference in Lebanon's internal affairs.

The Lebanese minister also claimed that Hezbollah's weapons had "proven ineffective" in defending Lebanon.

The Lebanese resistance movement has dismissed demands for disarmament, saying it will never lay down its weapons and will not hand over its arms cache to the army while Israel's military attacks against the country continue.

Iran protests US restrictions on its UN mission



Iran's Foreign Ministry on Thursday condemned the US for intensifying restrictions on Iran's diplomatic mission to the United Nations in New York, urging UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres to intervene to prevent further violation

of Iran's legal rights under the Host Country Agreement.

"The extensive limits on the residence and movement of Iranian diplomats, tightened banking restrictions, and constraints affecting daily purchases

represent pressures designed to disrupt the normal and lawful duties of Iran's diplomatic personnel," the ministry said in a statement, according to Tasnim.

The statement added that the US State Department's decision to bar three members of Iran's mission from continuing their work in New York was "a peak in lawlessness" and violations of host-country commitments, calling into question the United States' fitness to host the world body.

UN Deputy Spokesman Farhan Haq reacted to the US decision, saying Washing-

ton should have allowed accredited Iranian diplomats to carry out their work freely.

Haq affirmed the world body's position that Washington, as host country, was obligated to permit the unrestricted movement of all UN-based diplomatic staff.

"Whenever countries have faced restrictions on their diplomatic personnel, they raise that with us, and then we remind the host country of its obligations under the Host Country Agreement to allow the free movement of diplomats accredited to the United Nations," he said.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



President hails ‘decisive step’ in ties as Iran, Kazakhstan seal 14 deals

Economy Desk

Iran and Kazakhstan have signed 14 memoranda of understanding in Astana as Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Thursday met his Kazakh counterpart Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, marking what they described as a significant step in expanding bilateral ties.

In a ceremony attended by the two presidents, senior officials from both countries concluded agreements and MoUs covering transportation, transit and logistics, cultural exchanges, legal assistance, health and medical care, diplomatic interaction, and media cooperation, Press TV reported.

The two leaders also signed a joint statement outlining their commitment to deepen relations.

Pezeshkian, in Astana at the head of a high-ranking delegation, said the results of the visit represent “a major and decisive step” toward strengthening bilateral relations. He expressed optimism that the political will in Tehran and Astana could raise the volume of trade and investment to a level “worthy” of the two nations.

The Iranian president added that Iran and Kazakhstan must promote close relations to counter the United States’ unilateralism.

40% growth in bilateral trade

Pezeshkian said that the two countries have managed to achieve 40% growth in bilateral trade over the past 10 months and are ready to carry

out a roadmap aimed at raising the value of trade up to three billion dollars. He expressed hope that Tehran and Astana will make more use of the capacities of the private sector. He emphasized that Tehran and Astana interact closely on many regional and international issues, saying, “The two countries have had good cooperation in various political, economic, and cultural fields and have also reached valuable agreements.”

Pointing to Iran-Kazakhstan active cooperation in international organizations, he added that “the two countries maintain stable and close relations within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Eurasian Economic Union, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, as well as in matters concerning the Caspian Sea region.” He urged both countries to continue this path and focus on further promotion of cooperation.

Pezeshkian said the resolution of banking problems would play an important role in developing relations, and emphasized that the full implementation of the free trade agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union will pave the way for further expansion of trade and economic relations



between Tehran and Astana.

Tehran seeks to boost transit, private-sector projects

Also, on Thursday, during the joint session of high-level delegations from Iran and Kazakhstan in Astana, Pezeshkian highlighted Iran’s key role in the regional transport network, describing the country as the most cost-effective and efficient transit route for Kazakhstan.

“There is significant potential for the Kazakhstan-Turkmen-

istan-Iran corridor to expand transit cooperation, which would benefit both countries,” the president’s official website quoted him as saying.

He also pointed to private-sector initiatives, including the construction of a joint silo at the port of Aktau in southwestern Kazakhstan and the establishment of food packaging and storage facilities in the central Asian country. “These projects, it would be an effective step in strengthening economic cooperation,” Pezeshkian added.

Tokayev, in turn, highlighted the geostrategic importance of the region, noting that Kazakhstan, Iran, Iraq, Armenia, and Turkmenistan could establish a critical, future-oriented transport corridor.

He expressed his country’s strong interest in expanding comprehensive ties with Iran, saying, “Iran possesses extensive technical and economic capabilities, and we are eager to cooperate in various sectors, including logistics, healthcare, and other fields,” he said.

Tokayev welcomed Iran’s allocation of 15 hectares of land in the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas for joint development projects, describing the move as an effective step toward strengthening bilateral relations. Kazakhstan has received 15 hectares of land at Shahid Rajaei Port and is constructing a dedicated terminal. Following the Kazakhstan visit, the Iranian president headed to Turkmenistan, where an international summit revolving around peace would be held with several heads of state in attendance.

Iran, Spain eye renewable-energy cooperation despite sanctions hurdles

Economy Desk

Iran and Spain are examining new technical and educational cooperation in renewable energy, including solar and wind development, even as financial and insurance hurdles linked to Western sanctions persist, officials said during an online meeting hosted at Spain’s economic and commercial office in Tehran.

The session, organized by Iran’s Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (SATBA), has recently brought together 16 companies active in the renewable energy sector, IRNA reported.

In opening remarks, Spain’s Economic and Commercial Counselor in Tehran, Inigo Gil Cazares Armando underscored Iran’s strategic importance in the Middle East and its substantial potential in wind and solar energy, as well as Tehran’s broad plans to expand renewable power generation.

“There is scope for collaboration between Iran and Spain in supplying certain equipment, transferring technical and engineering services, and providing training and



human resource capacity building,” Armando said. He added that while such cooperation is not directly subject to primary or secondary US or European sanctions, “financial transaction difficulties and insurance coverage issues may pose challenges to interactions.”

At the meeting, Mohammad Satkin, Deputy Minister of Energy and Head of the SATBA also highlighted the country’s vast potential for constructing wind and solar power plants across various provinces and outlined ongoing national initiatives in this domain.

The Energy Ministry outlined potential areas of collaboration with Spanish companies, including the supply of specialized equipment and joint initiatives in training, scientific research, and technical development with their Iranian counterparts.

Iran’s operational renewable energy capacity currently stands at 3,165 megawatts, with solar power accounting for 66% of that total, according to the Energy Ministry. As of November 21, 2025, the country’s overall installed electricity generation capacity reached 97,909 megawatts, meaning renewables represent just 3.2% of the total.

During the meeting, Mehdi Tafazoli, head of SATBA’s International Cooperation De-

velopment Group, presented the organization’s investment models and drivers to Spanish participants. He highlighted joint training programs, the transfer of expertise on integrating renewables into the national grid, and the procurement of engineering services — especially for concentrated solar power plants and smart inverters — as priority areas for cooperation.

The discussions come as Spain, a European leader in renewable energy, generates 65% of its electricity from diverse renewable sources, including 35 gigawatts of installed solar capacity, 30 gigawatts of wind, and 20 gigawatts of hydroelectric power. The country is interconnected with the broader European power grid and hosts numerous leading firms in the wind energy sector.

In April 2025, Spain experienced a nationwide grid blackout, which some experts attributed to excessive solar power feeding into the system. Technical lessons from that incident could prove instructive for countries like Iran that are rapidly scaling up renewable deployment, officials noted.

Iran’s external debt falls 2.5% in 2024, World Bank reports



Economy Desk

Iran’s external debt declined by 2.5% in 2024, totaling \$9.654 billion, according to ILNA citing the World Bank’s latest report, marking a rare reduction amid rising debt levels in developing countries.

The report, released by the World Bank on the status of debt in developing economies, shows that total external debt for these countries increased by 1.1% last year, reaching \$8.9 trillion, about \$110 billion higher than in 2023.

While overall debt in developing countries grew, Iran’s external obligations dropped by \$247 million from roughly \$9.901 billion in 2023 to \$9.654 billion in 2024.

Despite Western sanctions, Iran has managed not only to avoid increasing its foreign debt in recent years but also to reduce

it significantly, from around \$19 billion in 2010 to nearly \$9 billion in 2024. Compared with total debt in developing nations, Iran’s external debt represents a tiny fraction, roughly one-thousandth of the \$8.9 trillion total.

The World Bank report indicates that Iran’s long-term debt stood at about \$1.051 billion at the end of 2024, down \$65 million from the previous year, while short-term debt remained unchanged at \$2.285 billion.

The International Monetary Fund granted Iran access to Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) in August 2021, providing the country with more than \$6 billion in foreign currency resources. By the end of 2024, Iran’s total IMF credits reached \$6.318 billion, down \$182 million from the previous year.

According to the report, Iran paid \$14 million in interest on its external debt in 2024.

Document on getting over Greater Middle East initiative



By Rahman Ghahremanpour
International affairs analyst

OPINION

Regarding the Middle East, the avowed American policy delineated in the second Trump administration's new national security strategy pivots on several fulcrums: the foremost and paramount tenet is the unequivocal declaration that the policy of state-nation fabrication no longer retains any station within Middle Eastern strategy. In other terms, the United States manifests no intent to engage in protracted hostilities aimed at advancing the state-nation construction projects or the democracy initiatives.

The document explicitly asserts that America is indifferent to the intrinsic nature of Middle Eastern political regimes; this stance constitutes a definitive repudiation of the objectives posited in the "Greater Middle East" scheme during the tenure of George W. Bush. Concurrently, the document emphasizes America's pursuit of increased investment in the region, particularly within the sectors of artificial intelligence and energy resources. The intended recipients of these investments are the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council states, notably the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Pertaining to Iran, multiple interpretations emerge from the document: first of all, America aims to convey to Israel that a renewed military confrontation with Iran is unnecessary. Another inference is that, to perpetuate Arab states' investments in the United States, and pursuant to assurances provided by President Trump to the Arabs, the document declares Iran as not constituting a threat to the region. Consequently, expectations for exceptional military and security aid from the US should not be entertained; investment continuation is imperative. A third, more pessimistic interpretation is that America warns that, if deemed necessary, it possesses the resolve to launch an offensive against Iran. Accordingly, if Iran's position in this document is scrutinized within the overarching purview of American strategy in the Middle East, attention must also be accorded to the second matter: "that the Strait of Hormuz remains open." It appears, as the document itself concedes, that from the perspective of US governmental authorities, the significance of the Middle East and Africa in American foreign policy has diminished, indicating that developments within these regions do not constitute a direct menace to US national security, and that, barring exigency, the United States will abstain from intervening in these zones. However, should regional security be imperiled, as the document unequivocally specifies, America will act without delay. The references to maintaining strategic straits likely denote the Straits of Hormuz and Bab al-Mandab. The goal of this emphasis is that within the novel order the US envisions for the Middle East, Iran must not be a threat to American interests in the area.

Concerning a potential conflict scenario in the Middle East and America's posture toward it, the document neither categorically rejects war nor explicitly alludes to its possibility; indeed, it exudes a certain strategic ambiguity. One may infer that this document intentionally evokes ambiguity concerning the issue to allow for American strategic flexibility.

Generally, the 2025 US National Security Strategy document, unlike its antecedents, largely mirrors the personal outlook and foreign policy approach of Trump and unabashedly references Trump's conduct and stance in foreign affairs.

From this vantage point, it can be asserted that this foreign policy bears a



From left to right, portraits of recent US presidents are displayed in chronological order: Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Joe Biden, and Donald Trump.

● RACHEL VENTRESCA/FORTUNE

retrospective orientation; namely, it is formulated based on Trump's initiatives over the preceding year and attempts more to theorize and publicly articulate past occurrences than to gaze forward.

Several salient points emerge within the National Security Strategy document. The prime and foundational issue is the abandonment of the "Pivot to Asia" policy previously central to American security strategy. Since 2012, roughly 13 years ago, official documents have designated the Asia pivot and containment of China as the principal macro-policy. Yet, in this document, this policy is for the first time explicitly renounced. Although it acknowledges China as the primary systemic rival to America, it omits mention of the Asia pivot or containment.

Two interpretations exist here: some contend that, due to ongoing trade negotiations between the US and China, America refrained from provoking China and therefore avoided using the term "containment of China," opting instead to speak of "economic competition with China". Accordingly, America's policy remains in practice to contain China, albeit with a different facade.

The second perspective holds that America has concluded it cannot contain China in the Indo-Pacific region and hence seeks, by emphasizing Latin America, to expel China from this

sphere, regarded as America's backyard. The second significant point is a policy that might loosely be termed a "pivot to Latin America" or a "pivot to the Western Hemisphere"; this signifies a revival of the Monroe Doctrine of the 19th century, aiming for American hegemony over Latin America, pursued irrespective of local governments' consent.

The second crucial matter entails America's efforts to concentrate on Latin America and resurrect the Monroe Doctrine. This elucidates America's intense focus on the Venezuelan crisis and its amplified military presence in Latin America and the Caribbean. Even if under the pretext of the Venezuelan crisis, these actions serve as a preamble to cementing long-term American hegemony in Latin America. The implicit meaning of this policy is America's endeavor to counteract or attenuate Chinese and even Russian influence within its customary sphere in Latin America.

The third topic involves America's and Trump's unexpected approach to Europe, unprecedentedly recorded in this document. In recent decades, no American official document has displayed such candor and audacity in criticizing Europe. The document states that Europe is experiencing "civilizational erasure" or decline.

Moreover, the document references halting NATO expansion, likely aimed at

efforts to detach Russia from China. It appears that the so-called "reverse Nixon Doctrine" — America's attempt to drive a wedge between Russia and China — accounts for America's stark tone toward Europe. The document also affirms that establishing peace in Ukraine is a vital American interest and, if required, America will negotiate directly with Russia, disregarding Europe. This position is exceedingly explicit and resolute, effectively demonstrating that European interests may be disregarded when necessary regarding Ukraine and Russia.

The final point concerns Russia itself. America's policy has shifted from isolating Russia to separating Russia from China. Whereas during the Biden and Obama administrations, America sought to acknowledge Russia as a waning power and isolate it as an autocratic regime — evidenced by Russia's expulsion from the G8 and other international bodies — Trump's 2025 National Security Strategy adopts the stance of distancing Russia from China. Nevertheless, this approach conflicts with the Trump administration's emphasis on establishing a "Golden Dome," for erecting such a shield would disrupt the extant strategic nuclear equilibrium between America and Russia.

The article first appeared in the Persian-language newspaper Iran.



Pertaining to Iran, multiple interpretations emerge from the document: first of all, America aims to convey to Israel that a renewed military confrontation with Iran is unnecessary. Another inference is that, to perpetuate Arab states' investments in the United States, and pursuant to assurances provided by President Trump to the Arabs, the document declares Iran as not constituting a threat to the region. Consequently, expectations for exceptional military and security aid from the US should not be entertained; investment continuation is imperative. A third, more pessimistic interpretation is that America warns that, if deemed necessary, it possesses the resolve to launch an offensive against Iran.



US and Chinese delegations, led by US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent (L), US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer (2nd-L), and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng (R), meet for trade talks in Geneva, Switzerland, on May 11, 2025.

● OFFICE OF US TRADE REPRESENTATIVE

Why Trump’s ‘America First’ security strategy is misguided, dangerous

By Steven Simon and Jonathan Stevenson
Former US National Security Council directors

OPINION

Even Republican members of Congress seem to be getting unnerved about US government-ordered strikes in the Caribbean that are an illegal, immoral, and distinctly unstrategic use of a superlative professional military. Yet the administration’s 2025 National Security Strategy, released recently and by turns incoherent, ahistorical, and specious, casts the strikes as a legitimate exercise of “the Trump corollary to the Monroe Doctrine” and one of any number of “targeted deployments to secure the border and defeat cartels”.

This strategy document focuses the United States’ attention on the Western Hemisphere. It subjects strategically crucial regions and allies to relegation and, in the case of Europe, outright subversion. It denigrates the European Union “and other transnational bodies that undermine political liberty and sovereignty,” while implicitly contemplating Europe’s right-wing nativist parties as instruments for “cultivating resistance to Europe’s current trajectory”. Those comments effectively codify JD Vance’s hectoring speech at the Munich Security Conference last February. As the United States systematically eviscerates its constitutional order and international standing, it presumes to tell Europe that it risks “civilizational erasure”.

This exposes an America morally and politically devouring itself while its true enemies, like Russia, watch astonished by their good fortune. The strategy looks like the Janus face of a fraying domestic constitutional order, providing geopolitical cover for domestic authoritarian rule and corporate aggrandizement. National strategy documents have tended to concentrate on external threats, from the Soviet Union to transnational jihadist terrorism to China. There is no reason the current strategy should break from this tradition. The salient risks to American interests do not lie within the United States or its longitudes.

The Trump administration justifies its proposed trillion-dollar defense budget by citing these threats from longstanding adversaries, and the newly released National Security Strategy pays lip service to them. But its call for “a readjustment of our global military presence to address urgent threats in our hemisphere” betrays a deeper strategic miscalculation, draining resources from areas that remain strategically vital to advance its pursuit of Latin American criminal gangs and phantom antifa groups. The US military’s Northern and Southern Commands, which cover the Western Hemisphere, are customarily relatively lightly endowed, but with the buildup of US forces in the Caribbean are now absorbing assets normally allocated to the Indo-Pacific Command, European Command, and Central Command, which are responsible for more challenging regions.

Most significantly, on the pretexts of protecting the country against “cultural subversion” and exercising “full control over our borders,” the strategy weaves together domestic and international America First agendas and unites North and South America as a geopolitical unit. This restructuring has profound strategic effects.

First, it contracts the United States’ defensive perimeter to the coastlines of these two continents, far from the reaches of the Asia-Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East that have defined it since the 1950s. Second, it removes boundaries and limits on the president’s use of the military. In deploying the military for



● CLAUDINE HELLMUTH/POLITICO

domestic law-enforcement purposes in cities such as Chicago, Mr. Trump is already erasing the sovereignty of states and cities within the United States. With the National Security Strategy, he is removing national sovereign boundaries outside the United States, too.

The new strategy establishes an essentially undifferentiated hemispheric homeland — namely, North and South America — in which the president is free to act unilaterally. Anything he perceives as misbehavior within that space becomes an actionable national security problem, even though the region remains stable.

This is the real Trump corollary to the Monroe Doctrine.

One possible benefit of a shrunken security perimeter and diminished projection of power could be greater restraint. The United States’ traditional forward defense has afforded it strategic depth and swift crisis response, but it has mismanaged these advantages with rash interventions, in particular, the 2003 Iraq war. In any case, the dangers of this insular strategy are vastly greater. When the National Security Strategy prescribes “the use of lethal force to replace the failed law enforcement-only strategy of the last several decades” in the

Western Hemisphere, it is referring to the pre-emptive military effort already underway against drug cartels, without serious reference to borders.

The most conspicuous move in that war is the use of US forces to kill alleged drug traffickers, mischaracterized as “terrorists” and posing no immediate threat to Americans, on board Venezuelan boats in international waters. The Trump administration is enlisting soldiers and sailors in potential war crimes and looking to legitimize extrajudicial killings.

The US military itself is not likely to rescue the constitutional order. The Pentagon is purging officers it deems ideologically incompatible with its priorities. When Adm. Alvin Holsey, as commander of Southern Command, privately voiced concerns about their legality and appeared to hesitate in preparing plans for retaking the Panama Canal, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth apparently insisted on his resignation. While the United States’ geopolitical reorientation toward the Western Hemisphere has reportedly been contested within the Pentagon, the new National Security Strategy appears calculated to end the debate.

The United States’ adversaries will surely have taken keen notice of the

Trump administration’s talk about Portland, Ore., in 2025 as though it were Stalingrad in 1943, as well as the president’s castigation of and distancing from American allies. They will see enhanced opportunities to stoke internecine tensions in the United States — as Russia has been doing for at least a decade — and thereby intensify the administration’s blinkered gaze on domestic enemies and enrich the pretexts for targeting them. The Trump administration might then repay the favor by maintaining its vow to undermine the political integrity of the European Union and NATO.

Despite the administration’s gaslighting, the Caribbean is not a war zone. Should domestic military operations turn lethal, if military targeting of suspected criminals becomes a permanent practice, or if the Trump administration undertakes coercive regime change in Venezuela, the United States’ prestige and leverage will decline further. The country will be left with diminished national security as well as a shattered constitutional order. It might even face “civilizational erasure”.

The full article first appeared on The New York Times.



This strategy document focuses the United States’ attention on the Western Hemisphere. It subjects strategically crucial regions and allies to relegation and, in the case of Europe, outright subversion. It denigrates the European Union “and other transnational bodies that undermine political liberty and sovereignty,” while implicitly contemplating Europe’s right-wing nativist parties as instruments for “cultivating resistance to Europe’s current trajectory”.



This screengrab from a video posted by US President Donald Trump, on his Truth Social account, shows what he says is US military forces conducting a strike on a boat carrying alleged Venezuelan drug traffickers in the Caribbean Sea on September 15, 2025.
● AFP

Volleyball yielded most team-sport success for Iran in 2025: *IRIVF* chief



Iranian players celebrate after defeating Italy in the FIVB Men's U21 World Championship final in Jiangmen, China, on August 31, 2025.
● FIVB



Members of the Iranian women's volleyball national team pose for photo after winning the bronze at the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on November 13, 2025.
● IRIVF

Sports Desk

Volleyball brought Iran "more international success in 2025 than any other team sport," insists Milad Taqavi, chairman of the country's Volleyball Federation (IRIVF). "It was an exceptionally hectic international season for us. We fielded Iranian teams in 37 tournaments across the globe, involving roughly 750 athletes," the head of the sport's national governing body told Mehr News Agency. "Our competition schedule spanned over the entire year – 377 days of matches against 476 different teams – which is remarkable in itself. Securing even a single medal in team sports is a formidable challenge, yet this year we won 10 gold, two silver, and three bronze medals across

various age and gender categories," Taqavi added. The standout achievement for Iran on the global stage came in August at the Men's U21 World Championship, where the defending champions rallied to beat Italy 3-1 in the final, claiming their third title in four editions. Five members of head coach Gholamreza Mo'menimoqaddam's squad – including MVP and Best Outside Hitter Seyyed Martin Hosseini – earned individual awards in Jiangmen, China. The year also marked a new chapter for the senior men's national team under Italian head coach Roberto Piazza. Iran recorded six wins in 12 outings to finish eighth in the 16-team table of the Volleyball Nations League – a major improvement on the previous two editions, where the

Asian powerhouse finished in the bottom three. Iran ultimately missed out on the VNL Finals after China secured the last quarterfinal berth as host, but Piazza's men carried their momentum into September's World Championship in the Philippines, where they reached the last eight before falling 3-1 to Czechia. The country also reached the semifinals of the Boys' U19 World Championship in July, though the two-time champion had to settle for fourth place in Tashkent after back-to-back defeats to France and Spain. "Volleyball was the only Iranian team sport represented in both the Asian Youth Games in Bahrain in October and the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh a month later," Taqavi said. "Of the

four indoor teams we sent, three returned with gold and one with bronze. I believe no other team sport has matched this record. The national teams' performance is entirely commendable and defensible, though we can't afford to get carried away by these results." The 2025 season produced mixed results for Iranian women's volleyball. South Korean head coach Lee Doh-ee's senior team finished sixth at the AVC Nations Cup in Hanoi in June, failing to qualify for next year's Asian Championship. Still, Lee's squad secured a milestone title at the CAVA Women's Volleyball Championship – featuring four Central Asian nations – with a straight-sets win over hosts Uzbekistan in October, marking Iran's first women's international

gold since the program launched in 1963. The team later added an ISG bronze in Riyadh. The Iranian women's U18 team, meanwhile, stole the spotlight by winning gold at the Asian Youth Games under Lee, conceding only two sets across six victories before rallying past Indonesia in a five-set final thriller. Regarding the women's performance at the Islamic Solidarity Games – where they slipped one place on the podium compared to the previous edition – Taqavi said: "Had our team opened its campaign against Türkiye instead of Azerbaijan, the outcome might have been different. I believe there isn't a significant difference between silver and bronze, though the gap between gold and silver is considerable. The fact that our women re-

turned with a medal is commendable in itself." "The women's national team is young and developing. They face a demanding year ahead, including the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in late summer – a landmark occasion, as it will be the first time since the 1979 Islamic Revolution that the women's volleyball team joins Iran's delegation at the continental showpiece. I am truly optimistic about their prospects next year," he added. "Next year will be critical and challenging for both the women's and men's teams, and we hope to achieve even better results. The average age of our senior national squads is under 25, and we expect improvements as the players gain more experience."

Asian Youth Para Games: Powerlifting, swimming glory headline Iran's medal sweep on Day 3

Sports Desk

Iranian athletes continued their medal-laden campaign on the third day of the Asian Youth Para Games in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, achieving success in powerlifting and swimming events on Friday. Reza Enayatollahi and Amirali Es'haqnia delivered record-breaking performances, adding double golds to Iran's para powerlifting medal haul, while the Iranian boys collected an impressive 61 medals across various swimming categories. Enayatollahi posted a new world junior record of 205kg to claim the ultimate prize in the boys' 107kg category, while Es'haqnia shattered the world cadet record in the boys' +107kg class, lifting 175kg with his fourth attempt en route to gold. The two golds capped off a remarkable powerlifting run for Iran, which finished with 20 medals, including nine golds, in Dubai – among them three women's golds won by Zahra Pouladi, Mahdiyeh Ehsani, and Atiyeh Hosseini. Elsewhere, Sepanta Navidi, Sepehr Seifi, Ali Houshmandi, Ali Hassan-zadeh, Taha Azizi, Seyyed Erfan Ja'fari, Abolfazl Zarifpour, and Mo-



Iran's Amirali Es'haqnia celebrates after posting a successful effort en route to the powerlifting gold at the Asian Youth Para Games in Dubai, UAE, on December 12, 2025.
● IRNA

hammad-Taha Baqeri continued Iran's flying start in para swimming, claiming 14 golds across different categories. Friday's results came after Iranians had collected 41 medals on the preceding day of competition. The highlight of Iran's second-day success came in para armwrestling, where the country bagged 32 medals, including eight golds. Iranian girls Vida Jabbarzadeh and Kowsar Qaraei, who each won two golds, along with Reihaneh Roustaei and Fatemeh Hazbian, were joined by male teammate Ali

Nozhati – who also grabbed two gold medals – in securing top honors in their respective categories. In 3x3 wheelchair basketball, the Iranian men's team – comprising Mohammad-Taha Yarmohammadi, Fo'ad Mozaffari Afkham, Abolfazl Jalaei, and Amirmahdi Yousefi – defeated Japan 15-9 in the final to win gold. The Iranian female team – represented by Zahra Nasri, Roqayeh Salehi, Roqayeh Amiri, and Fatemeh Molaei – settled for silver after a 13-7 final loss to Thailand.

Iran remains fifth in Futsal Men's World Ranking, drops to 10th in women's division

Sports Desk

Iran retained the fifth spot in the latest FIFA Futsal Men's World Ranking, released by the sport's international governing body on Friday. Having won a sensational gold medal at November's Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh, the Asian powerhouse collected 1,484.23 points to remain the top team in the continent. Vahid Shamsaei's team defeated Morocco 5-0 in the final in the Saudi capital, making amends for last year's quarterfinal exit against the African champion at the Futsal World Cup in Uzbekistan. Iran is now preparing for the upcoming AFC Futsal Asian Cup, starting January 26 in Jakarta, Indonesia. The record 13-time champion will begin its title defense in Group D against Malaysia on January 28, before facing Saudi Arabia two days later. The final group fixture will see Shamsaei's men take on Afghanistan on February 1 – a rematch of their 2-2 draw in Riyadh. The top seven of the Men's

Ranking remained unchanged, with world No. 1 Brazil followed by Portugal, Spain, and Argentina. Morocco and Russia stand immediately behind Iran. In the Women's Ranking, meanwhile, Iran dropped one spot to 10th with 1,157.19 points – third in Asia behind Japan, which is sixth, and eighth-placed Thailand. Iran participated in the recently concluded Women's World Cup in the Philippines but failed to advance beyond the group stage. Shahrzad

Mozaffar's team suffered a 4-1 defeat to Brazil in their Group D opener but bounced back to defeat Panama 6-2 in their second game in Pasig. A 3-1 loss to Italy, however, left Iran behind the European side in the group standings, allowing Brazil and Italy to advance to the quarterfinals. Brazil, which went on to defeat Portugal in the final last week, topped the Women's Ranking, followed by Spain, Portugal, Argentina, Italy, Japan, Colombia, Thailand, and Russia.





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Ayeneh-Kari of Iran added to UNESCO’s Intangible Heritage List

Iranica Desk

The art of mirror-work in Iranian architecture has been officially inscribed on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The decision was adopted during the 20th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, held in New Delhi, India. The element was registered under its official title: “Ayeneh-Kari, the art of mirror-work in Persian architecture.” With this inscription, the number

of Iran’s registered intangible cultural heritage elements has risen to 27. This marks the first time an element specifically linked to Persian architecture has been included in UNESCO’s intangible heritage records, placing “Persian Architecture” as a recognized category within UNESCO’s documentation, WANA News Agency reported. Iran submitted the nomination file in April 2024. The dossier received praise from UNESCO’s evaluation body for its high quality, leading to its approval by the Intergovernmental Committee.

As part of this year’s official program, Iran’s Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, in cooperation with the Mana Naghsh Heritage Institute (which prepared the dossier), organized an exhibition on the global registration of mirror-work in Persian architecture. The initiative, held in partnership with UNESCO, was regarded as a notable and rare form of collaboration for an intergovernmental meeting. According to the nomination file, Ayeneh-Kari is a handcrafted decorative art applied to architectur-

al surfaces such as ceilings, walls, domes, columns, and panels. It involves cutting and shaping mirrors into geometric or organic patterns and fixing them onto surfaces to create designs that reflect light and illuminate the space. The craft integrates multiple skills, including design, mirror-cutting, plasterwork, painting, and mosaic techniques. In traditional communities, mirrors and water symbolize purity and clarity, and mirror-work reflects the cultural value placed on light and illumination.

The craft is transmitted both informally — through apprenticeships and workshops — and formally through universities, NGOs, and educational institutions. Often, Ayeneh-Kari is a family profession passed down through generations from grandfathers, fathers, and uncles to younger family members. Master mirror-workers hold high social status, and the art is regarded as both luxurious and spiritual. It decorates a wide range of traditional and contemporary spaces, from sacred shrines and religious buildings

to royal palaces and private residences. Today, the practice remains vital in the restoration of historic sites and in modern architectural design. Iran has previously registered elements such as traditional carpet weaving in Kashan, the Radif of Iranian music, Ta’zieh, the music of Khorasan Bakhshis, Naqqali, Nowruz, the art of building and playing the Kamancheh, the knowledge of Lenj boatbuilding, Lavash bread culture, Persian miniature art, Yalda traditions, Turkmen needlework, the Sadeh and Mehregan festivals, etc.

Kataleh Khor Cave inviting nature lovers, adventure seekers

Iranica Desk

Caves, one of nature’s most remarkable formations, serve as windows into the Earth, shaped over millennia by underground water flow. While these natural structures once provided shelter and habitat for early humans during long periods of cave-dwelling, today they represent invaluable resources for archaeology, environmental studies, geology, and research into past human life. At the same time, they remain among Iran’s most fascinating tourist attractions. Fossils, wall inscriptions, ancient tools, and remnants of past human settlements found in caves offer researchers rich insights into the customs, traditions, and cultural connections of ancient societies. Currently, approximately 2,500 caves have been identified across Iran, of which 2,000 have been officially documented, and 21 have been registered as national natural monuments, according to IRNA. Caves hold significant value from multiple perspectives — biodiversity, environmental importance, and economic, social, and cultural relevance. They are crucial for nature tourism, scientific research, and the preservation of genetic resources. A key feature of caves is that they function as ecosystems distinct from their surrounding environments, allowing endemic and unique animal species — found nowhere else — to thrive. This uniqueness has increased their conservation importance, and so far, 33 caves have been classified based on their ecological and protective significance. Among Iran’s natural wonders, Kataleh Khor Cave — located 155 kilometers south of Zanjan’s provincial center in the city of Garmab — stands out as a spectacular attraction. Of



alibaba.ir

the roughly 30 kilometers of passages explored within this mysterious world, a 1,700-meter route has been prepared for public visits. As a limestone cave, Kataleh Khor is one of the largest limestone caves in the world by area and is recognized as the only multi-layered limestone cave in the world, comprising seven floors, some of which remain inaccessible. Its multiple layers, colorful stalactites, and limestone formations make it a truly unique site on the global stage. The cave was first discovered in 1952 by a group of mountaineers, and although a large section was explored in 1986, vast portions remain uncharted. With an estimated age of over 120 million years, Kataleh Khor Cave — spanning seven levels — ranks among the deepest underground marvels in the country. Each year, it attracts thousands of tourists and nature enthusiasts seeking adventure and environmental experiences. Visitors can explore its passages and rest in specially designed on-site suites, creating memorable encounters with nature. Despite its beauty and allure, Kataleh Khor faces challenges. One of the main concerns for



visitors and local residents is the development of the cave and the creation of accessible infrastructure, including smooth roads, to facilitate easier access to this extraordinary natural attraction. Protecting this unique cave also requires proper management and a deeper understanding among officials of its significance. Currently, ten different organizations are involved in cave management. While Kataleh Khor is one of Iran’s key tourist caves, raising cultural awareness and educating visitors are essential to ensure that the cave remains unharmed while welcoming spelunkers and tourists,

preserving its treasures and natural beauty for future generations. During a visit to Zanjan on November 18, Seyyed Reza Salehi Amiri, Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, toured the magnificent Kataleh Khor Cave nestled in the mountains of Khodabandeh. He emphasized the need for the cave’s development, the creation of easier access infrastructure for tourists, and ensuring that local communities benefit from this natural attraction. The minister highlighted the development of Kataleh Khor as a priority for the ministry,

stressing the importance of generating sustainable economic benefits for local residents. He also invited all Iranians to visit this natural wonder at least once, noting that Kataleh Khor represents one of the most stunning manifestations of nature in the country. Referring to three main axes for the development of Kataleh Khor Cave, Salehi Amiri described these measures as key demands from both the public and local officials, urging serious follow-up. He further noted that improving the access road to the cave is among the top priorities for ensuring safe and convenient visitation. The minister emphasized that a proper access road is the first step toward boosting tourism in the region. Highlighting the need to attract investors for tourism infrastructure, he added: “Providing suitable facilities for visitors requires investment. To develop the cave and enhance tourism services, we will pursue investment through the Cultural Heritage Revitalization Fund and the utilization of historical and cultural sites.” Salehi Amiri noted that the main goal is to create an environment where tourists can visit com-

fortably while improving the quality of services in the region. He stressed that the people of Garmab and surrounding villages should directly benefit from the cave’s development. “Our priority is that the development of Kataleh Khor Cave brings tangible economic advantages to the residents of the area,” he concluded. Following these developments, the Governor of Zanjan Province announced the formation of a working group to examine and resolve the issues facing Kataleh Khor Cave. “According to the directive of the Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, a task force has been established to review and address the problems of Kataleh Khor Cave,” Hassan Sadeqi stated. He added that during his visit, the minister conducted field inspections of historical sites in Zanjan, Khodabandeh, and Soltaniyeh — including Kataleh Khor — providing guidance and solutions to overcome challenges in these areas. The deputy head of Zanjan Province’s Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization emphasized that, given the special status of Kataleh Khor Cave and other religious sites, the region centered around Qeydar town should be developed as a cultural hub. Davoud Abian noted that lighting the cave during Nowruz and other special occasions enhances its visual appeal. He further explained that the site is prepared for visitors during major holidays, especially Nowruz, through the efforts of Garmab Municipality. Facilities such as restaurants, accommodation platforms, supermarkets, pavilions, parking areas, boating services, prayer rooms, and more are provided to ensure a comfortable and enjoyable experience for tourists.



Iran's cultural diplomacy in Europe

Greece backs Iranian museum show, discusses direct flights

Arts & Culture Desk

Greece has expressed support for a major exhibition of Iranian artifacts and signaled willingness to discuss easing visas and restoring direct flights, Iran's minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri said in Athens. The talks also advanced plans for a joint "Persepolis-Acropolis" symphony and a long-term cultural agreement. Salehi-Amiri, who arrived on December 11 to attend the Ancient Civilizations Forum, said both governments had "a clear path" to improve travel links, IRNA reported. He added that Athens welcomed Tehran's proposal to stage the museum show at the Byzantine and Christian Museum and supported the joint symphonic project. Greek culture minister Lina Mendoni described the cultural ties as "unbreakable" and said she saw no limits to cooperation. Earlier on Thursday, Salehi-Amiri met Iranian-studies scholars, Greek academics and tourism agencies to press for deeper people-to-people links. He described Iran as "one of the safest and most attractive" destinations and said visi-

tors return with an image "completely different" from prevailing stereotypes. He noted that lack of direct flights and visa complexities were "the main obstacles" to higher tourism flows and required bilateral work. Greek agency managers reiterated these barriers, urging technical coordination to open the route. Cultural figures recommended easier travel, joint research projects, and regular academic exchanges to rebuild connections weakened over recent decades. Salehi-Amiri said Iran was ready to host Greek artists and craft producers, proposing joint bazaars and exhibitions to showcase both nations' traditions. He highlighted Iran's rich handicrafts sector and said museums, orchestras, and conservation bodies should underpin long-term programs. He confirmed that Tehran and Athens plan to establish a joint committee to draft a comprehensive cultural and tourism agreement. Mendoni said the accord could be finalized promptly and asked both sides to work on a tight schedule.

At the Ancient Civilizations Forum on December 12, held beside the Acropolis, Salehi-Amiri warned that digital forgery and AI-generated historical inaccuracies threaten shared heritage. He said cultural sites in Afghanistan and Syria had suffered heavily and any strike on heritage damages the "collective memory" of nations. He also referenced Israel's recent strike on Iranian territory, noting that cultural centers remain exposed during military crises. Salehi-Amiri said Iran, with millions of artifacts and dozens of UNESCO-listed sites, favors practical collaboration over mere statements. He called for joint action against antiquities smuggling and coordinated responses to climate-driven damage to archaeological zones. He proposed establishing a council of universities from ancient civilizations as the forum's research arm and said Iran's historic University of Gondishapur was ready to lead. Delegates discussed technical cooperation, specialist exchanges, and data-sharing on climate risks.



During his Athens visit, Salehi-Amiri promoted wider academic exchanges, student mobility, and collaboration between Iran's Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Greek scientific centers. He highlighted shared work on restoration and underwater heritage.

He also cited the Armenian Philharmonic Orchestra's performance at Persepolis and suggested a joint "Persepolis-Acropolis" orchestra in Athens and Shiraz. Mendoni called the idea "inspiring and achievable" and said Greece was prepared to move swiftly.

Curtains down on Int'l Theater Festival for Children and Youth

Stage art event conveys values to Iran's next generation

Arts & Culture Desk

The 30th International Theater Festival for Children and Youth closed on Thursday in the western city of Hamedan, where senior Culture Ministry officials said the event gives artists a rare chance to pass ethical, educational and creative messages to what they called Iran's "future builders." Mohammad-Reza Javadi, head of the Culture Ministry's Hamedan office, said in a video message that the festival offers

an "valuable opportunity" for theater groups to convey moral and educational themes to young audiences through "creative, appealing and effective" performances, ILNA reported. He said one of the festival's core missions is to boost joy, hope and a sense of responsibility among children and teenagers. Mohammad-Mehdi Ahmadi, the culture minister's senior adviser and acting arts deputy, attended the ceremony at the Avicenna Cultural Center, where the

festival named winners in six categories. This year, 63 troupes staged 193 shows in 16 indoor venues and several outdoor and street sites across the city, drawing more than 70,000 spectators. Hamid-Reza Haji-Babai, deputy speaker of parliament and Hamedan's representative, said the city has held on to the festival for 30 years and intends to secure it permanently. He recalled that Hamedan once hosted Iran's children's film festival but "lost it due to neglect." He noted that Iran's Su-

preme Leader, during a 2004 visit, said a historic city like Hamedan remains "active in a way unmatched elsewhere," a remark that later led to its designation as Iran's capital of history and civilization. Haji-Babai said officials are drawing up a formal charter to register the event as a permanent national festival so it can run each year "without ambiguity." He argued that Hamedan's archeological heritage, local artistic talent and its transport and academic hubs make it the natural host.

Festival director Azadeh Ansari said in a video message that this year's theme, "today's child, a new narrative, tomorrow's stage", came to life in shows filled with color, sound and "hope." She said young spectators responded with attentive silences and bursts of applause, showing how sharply they observe the world. She thanked the judges, crews and residents of Hamedan for supporting the event, adding that preparations for next year's 31st edition will begin immediately.

Iran opens new school for expatriates in Doha



Iran's Education Minister Alireza Kazemi and Qatar's Education Minister Lolwah bint Rashid bin Mohammed Al Khater cut the ribbon to inaugurate a new Iranian school for expatriates in Doha, December 11, 2025.
● PANA

Social Desk

Iran inaugurated a large, state-of-the-art school for its expatriate community in Doha on Thursday, marking a key expansion of educational and cultural ties between Tehran and Doha. The ceremony took place in the presence of Iran's Minister of Education Alireza Kazemi and Qatar's Minister of Education and Higher Education Lolwah bint Rashid bin Mohammed Al Khater, dolat.ir reported. Officials said the school is among the largest and most

technologically equipped Iranian institutions outside Iran. It features modern classrooms, science laboratories, a library, and extensive extracurricular facilities, providing a comprehensive curriculum for Iranian students living in Qatar. Kazemi described the facility as a step to "elevate access to quality schooling for Iranian students abroad" and said it will strengthen both educational continuity and cultural identity for families overseas. The visit also included the opening of the first overseas branch of Iran's student-focused PANA news agency in

Doha. The office will train young reporters, foster student journalism, and expand media coverage of educational and cultural initiatives within the Iranian diaspora. Kazemi framed the school and media office as part of a "commitment to educational excellence and cross-border cooperation," underscoring Iran's strategy to integrate cultural and educational outreach into its international diplomacy. The Doha school will begin full classes in early 2026, enrolling students from primary through secondary levels. Officials anticipate it will serve as a hub for extracurricular programs, cultural events, and ongoing educational exchanges between Iran and Qatar.

Iraq's freeze-and ...

When the Trump administration came to power, the pressure became significantly harsher through sanctions and overt threats. Given Iraq's fear of renewed unrest, the government tried to maintain balanced relations with the US. As a result, it undertook several financial and banking measures to ensure cooperation with Washington in the monetary sphere. Iraqi officials argued that they had no alternative, they could not ignore the US-dominated international financial system, especially since Iraq urgently needs reconstruction after the war against Daesh. That is why Baghdad has aligned its financial system with international sanctions regulations. Regarding resistance groups, US authorities have repeatedly monitored Iraqi channels and warned Baghdad that continuing military or financial support for Hezbollah would expose Iraq to serious retaliation. Iraqi officials have repeatedly stressed in interviews that Baghdad does not wish to take sides; the government aims to keep out of the confrontation while adhering to the international banking system. As noted, after the Central Bank's announcement, even the bank itself appeared unsure how to proceed, not

expecting the decision to appear in the gazette, a publication that ordinary citizens rarely monitor. The bank was reportedly caught off guard and sent a letter to the prime minister seeking clarification. But following street protests and public outrage, the prime minister, who was already under pressure, quickly moved to withdraw the measure. Attention now shifts to the upcoming FATF plenary meeting, since the committee had invoked not only Resolution 1373 but also the CFT, which allows states to define terrorism based on domestic law. Because neither of the two groups is listed as terrorist organizations inside Iraq, removing them from the committee's list will not trigger major financial consequences, such as the cancellation of investment contracts. No disruption of economic ties with Iraq is expected as a result of their removal either.

Can this be seen as part of the Iraqi government's effort to assert political authority and independence in the face of Western pressure?

Some observers have long stressed that the Sudan government has no interest in defying international financial norms. Baghdad is seeking to establish joint banks with other countries and to expand electronic payment systems,

a move that would reduce cash usage and directly target networks that have been attempting to circumvent western sanctions. If Iraqi banks shift to fully digitized banking, financial flows become entirely transparent. Even now, Iraqi banks tightly monitor all financial transactions by individuals and companies, while the US sometimes gains information about transactions, creating the risk of sanctions against those involved. Therefore, whether or not these two groups appear on the committee's list does not change the core reality: Iraq's banking system, tied to the international financial network, will not allow non-state armed groups to conduct high-volume financial transfers. This financial environment has already reassured foreign investors, who have begun forming partnerships in Iraq. Thus, any Iraqi government, given the intense pressure from Western states, cannot simply leave the door open for large-scale financial support to armed groups. One of the main reasons why digital currency systems and informal money-exchange networks are banned in Iraq, with heavy penalties and even criminal sentences, is precisely because they can be used to get around sanctions and to finance armed groups.