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Israel's Somaliland gamble risks alienating Western allies

By Delaram Ahmadi
Staff writer

INTERVIEW
EXCLUSIVE



Somaliland, a region in northern Somalia that declared independence in 1991, went unrecognized by any country for decades until December 2025, when Israel became the first state in the world to recognize it as an independent country, describing the move within the "spirit of the Abraham Accords." The decision triggered widespread opposition, including from Western countries and Israel's own allies. The recognition of this Horn of Africa entity, located along the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, has raised concerns about potential Israeli use of Somaliland's ports for military purposes or even the possible transfer of Palestinians from Gaza. In an interview with Iran Daily, Mansour Barati, an analyst of Israeli affairs, said that recognizing Somaliland represents a realist response by Israel to manage security threats, contain rivals, and safeguard vital economic arteries in a turbulent international system. However, the lack of alignment by the United States and the European Union could impose meaningful diplomatic costs on Israel.

IRAN DAILY: What strategic and geopolitical objectives is Israel pursuing by recognizing Somaliland? To what extent have geopolitical rivalries in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden shaped this decision?

BARATI: Reducing Israel's recognition of Somaliland to a purely diplomatic decision constitutes an analytical error. The core of this development should instead be traced to a shift in the status of the "Red Sea" within Israel's national security doctrine. This vital waterway, which is Israel's sole maritime access route to the East, has in recent years transformed from a relatively secure commercial passage into a focal point of power competition and security threats.

Within this context, Somaliland has acquired strategic significance for Tel Aviv for several key reasons. First, stability in a turbulent environment: unlike Somalia's central government, which has grappled with structural instability for years, Somaliland has maintained a degree of political order and internal security. For intelligence and security cooperation, this level of "governance efficiency" outweighs international legitimacy. The region's geography, overlooking the Bab al-Mandeb strait, has turned it into an ideal location for maritime monitoring and surveillance.

Second, threat balancing and strategic depth: escalating competition with Iran and the rise of asymmetric threats against shipping have compelled Israel to redefine a new layer of "strategic depth." A presence in the Horn of Africa allows Israel to extend its defensive and deterrence layers beyond its immediate borders.

Third, drawing Somaliland into the Abraham Accords framework constitutes another driver behind Tel Aviv's willingness to recognize the region's separatist authorities.

Moreover, the convergence of Israeli and Emirati interests following the Abraham Accords has laid the groundwork for this presence. Accordingly, Israel's tilt toward Somaliland is not a symbolic act of state-building, but a realist response aimed at managing security threats, containing rivals, and protecting vital economic lifelines in a strained international system.

What consequences could opposition from global powers, including the United States and the European Union, have for the future of this decision? Conversely, how might this move affect Israel's relations with Washington and Brussels if their opposition persists?

Opposition by the United States and the European Union carries decisive implications for both the future of this decision and Israel's relations with the West. The official position of Washington and Brussels, which is reiterated explicitly in documents issued by the US State Department and the European External Action Service, is anchored in the principle of "preserving Somalia's territorial integrity" and supporting the federal government based in Mogadishu. From their perspective, unilateral recognition of Somaliland would not contribute to stability in the Horn of Africa, but could instead set a dangerous precedent for separatism, weaken fragile states, and intensify geopolitical rivalries in the Red Sea region.

Within this framework, Western opposition effectively constrains the institutionalization of Somaliland's independence. Absent US and EU backing, Somaliland will remain deprived of broad international recognition, United Nations membership, access to global financial institutions, and durable legal legitimacy, a condition that, according to assessments by the International Crisis Group, leaves the entity economically and security-wise fragile.

At the bilateral level, Israel's recognition of Somaliland, should Western opposition persist, may be viewed as a move out of step with the strategic consensus of the United States and the European Union.

Government 'recognizes' public protests, demands

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Government spokeswoman Fatemeh Mohajerani speaks to reporters during a weekly press briefing in Tehran, Iran on December 30, 2025.
● MIZAN



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Government 'recognizes' public protests, demands

National Desk

Iranian government spokeswoman Fatemeh Mohajerani said President Masoud Pezeshkian's administration takes the citizens' protests seriously and acknowledges the existence of livelihood problems amid deteriorating economic conditions due to a record-low plunge in national currency over illegal US sanctions.

Several protests have over the past three days erupted in downtown Tehran after business owners closed down their shops in reaction to a free-falling national currency, as Iran's rial on Sunday fell to 1.42 million to the US dollar.

Shopkeepers near two major tech and mobile phone shopping centers in the capital's Jomhouri area closed their businesses and chanted slogans on Sunday, before more incidents were recorded on Monday afternoon, this time with other people appearing to participate.

Many shops were closed down by owners in and around Tehran's Grand Bazaar as well, with some footage showing business owners asking others to do the same.

"We see how people are struggling with their livelihoods these days. One of the duties of the government and the ruling system is to have a listening ear. Wherever there is pain, there is a cry. We see, hear, and acknowledge protests, crises, and hardships," Mohajerani said.

"The government recognizes these protests," she added. "The government views not only bottlenecks but also crises as an opportunity to repair and strengthen the social foundation, so that we can strengthen the basis for dialogue."

Stating that the natural reaction to economic and livelihood pressures is what is observed at the societal level, the government spokeswoman said, "I emphasize that we recognize people's protests and stress peaceful gatherings, which are also recognized in our constitution. We all must contribute to the national cohesion of the country."

Mohajerani said, "The government, even if there are harsh voices, will patiently listen to these voices, because we believe that our people are patient enough, and when they raise their voices, it indicates the high pressure they are under. The government's job is to listen to the people's voices and help reach a common understanding to solve the existing problems in society."

President calls for listening to 'legitimate demands'

Pezeshkian said he had called on the Interior Ministry to "listen to the legitimate demands" of the protesters after several days of demonstrations by shopkeepers in Tehran.

"The livelihood of the people is my daily

concern. We have fundamental measures on the agenda to reform the monetary and banking system and preserve the purchasing power of the people," the president wrote on his X account.

"I have asked the Interior Minister to listen to the legitimate demands of the protesters by engaging in dialogue with their representatives so that the government can do everything in its power to resolve the problems and act responsibly."

Earlier on Tuesday, Pezeshkian held a cordial meeting with a group of heads of guilds, unions, chambers of commerce, and members of the market's board of trustees.

The president carefully and meticulously listened to their concerns and opinions, engaging in discussions with them.

Public concerns, protests must be addressed responsibly: Qalibaf

Meanwhile, Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf underlined that the public concerns and protests regarding livelihood issues must be treated with full accountability.

"People's concerns and protests about livelihood problems must be addressed responsibly," Qalibaf was quoted as saying by the state television.

"Immediate decisions are necessary to maintain people's purchasing power," he added, "and assure people that wrong



Iranian government spokeswoman Fatemeh Mohajerani speaks in a weekly press briefing on December 30, 2025.
● IRNA

economic practices are changing and improving."

Qalibaf also accused Iran's enemies of seeking to exploit the protests.

Mohammad Reza Farzin, governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), resigned on Monday after the rapid depreciation, which pushed up prices of food and other daily necessities.

When he took office in 2022, the rial was trading at around 430,000 to the dollar.

In December, Iran's inflation stood at 52 percent year-on-year, according to official statistics. But this figure still falls far short of many price increases, especially for basic necessities.

The country's economy, already battered by decades of Western sanctions, was further strained after the United Nations in late September reinstated international sanctions linked to the country's nuclear program that were lifted 10 years ago.

Pezeshkian warns of 'regret-inducing' response to renewed aggression



Fattah ballistic missile
● AP

International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian issued on Tuesday a firm rebuttal to Donald Trump's latest threat of renewed attacks on the Islamic Republic, vowing that any further aggression will be met with a crushing and "regret-inducing" response.

"The response of the Islamic Republic of Iran to any oppressive aggression will be se-

vere and regret-inducing," Pezeshkian wrote in a message on the X social media platform. Speaking at a joint press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Florida on Monday, Trump threatened to "eradicate" any attempt by Tehran to advance its nuclear program or bolster its ballistic missile capabilities. It is the first time Trump has explicitly

threatened military action against Iran's conventional missile program, a cornerstone of the country's defensive doctrine.

Iran and the US were in the middle of nuclear negotiations in June when Israel launched the surprise attack on Iran, a few days before the sixth round of talks between Tehran and Washington.

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

On June 24, Iran, through its successful retaliatory operations against both the Israeli regime and the US, managed to impose a halt to the illegal as-

sault.

Russia urges restraint after Trump's strike rant

The Kremlin called on all parties to refrain from escalation over Iran after the US president said Washington could support another strike on the Islamic Republic if it continues to advance its nuclear and ballistic missile programs.

"We believe that it is necessary to refrain from any steps that could escalate tensions in the region, and we believe that, first and foremost, dialogue with Iran is necessary," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

The spokesman also said Russia would continue to cultivate close ties with Iran.

Iran designates Canada's navy as 'terrorist organization' over IRGC listing

Iran has officially designated the Royal Canadian Navy as a terrorist organization in response to the "illegal decision" by the Canadian government targeting part of the Iranian Armed Forces, Press TV reported.

In a statement released on Tuesday, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said the move was taken under the framework of the law "Reciprocal Action Against the US Designation of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) As a Terrorist Organization," extending the provisions of that law to Canada.

The ministry said Ottawa's decision to label the IRGC, "which is recognized as one of the pillars of the country's official armed forces," violated fundamental principles of international law.

According to the statement, Iran acted based on the principle of reciprocity and Article 7 of the 2019 law, which stipulates that "all countries that in any way follow or support the decision of the United States of America to designate the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps as a terrorist organization shall be subject to reciprocal action."

On that basis, the ministry said, the Royal Canadian Navy falls under the scope of the law and has been identified and announced as a terrorist organization.

The Foreign Ministry said the decision came in direct response to Canada's move last year to designate the IRGC, describing it as part of Ottawa's continued hostile approach toward Tehran.



Iran's Foreign Ministry
● IRNA

Canada broke off diplomatic ties with Iran and closed its Tehran embassy in a surprise move in 2012, citing various reasons, including Iran's support for Syria, its nuclear work, and alleged threats to the Israeli regime.

In the same year, however, Ottawa took off the anti-Iran terrorist Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO) from its list of terrorist organizations.

The delisting came after around a decade of campaigning and expenditure of millions of dollars by the cult, which has openly boasted about carrying out terrorist operations against thousands of Iranian officials and civilians.

On June 19, 2024, Canada placed the IRGC on its list of terrorist organizations, a move that was strongly condemned by Iranian authorities at the time.

Tehran has repeatedly rejected such designations, saying they lack legal basis and undermine international norms governing relations between states.

Israel's Somaliland gamble ...

Studies by the Brookings Institution and the Council on Foreign Relations indicate that such actions, particularly at a time when Israel's relations with the West are already strained over the Palestine and Gaza, could trigger heightened diplomatic criticism, reduced political coordination on African and Red Sea dossiers, and increased sensitivity in Washington and Brussels toward Israel's regional conduct. As a result, this decision may generate new political and diplomatic costs for Israel rather than delivering a sustainable geopolitical gain.

Can this Israeli move be analyzed within the framework of its regional policies, particularly its approach toward Iran?

Israel's decision can be systematically analyzed within the framework of its regional policies, especially its strategy to

contain Iran's regional influence. Analyses by the "Institute for National Security Studies" underscore that the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea form part of Israel's peripheral security belt, an arena in which Iranian presence or the expansion of influence by aligned actors is viewed as a direct threat to Israel's maritime security and strategic interests.

From this vantage point, Israel's recognition of Somaliland is not merely symbolic, but rather a geopolitical instrument designed to establish and entrench political-security access near the strategic Bab al-Mandeb Strait. Reports published by the RAND Corporation and the Council on Foreign Relations suggest that Israel has, in recent years, sought to step up bilateral ties with actors along the Red Sea rim and in the Horn of Africa to monitor and constrain Iran's regional penetration routes and its dealings with Tehran-aligned actors, including Yemen's

Ansarullah movement.

In the context of Israel-Iran rivalry, Somaliland's importance exceeds its formal international legal weight due to its proximity to one of the world's most sensitive energy and maritime trade chokepoints. Studies by the Brookings Institution emphasize that Israel's Africa policy over the past decade has taken on an increasingly security-centric character, effectively becoming an extension of its regional deterrence posture vis-à-vis Iran.

At the same time, these sources caution that recognizing Somaliland, particularly in the absence of US and EU alignment, could impose significant diplomatic costs on Israel. Such a trajectory may undercut political coordination with Western allies and weaken Israel's capacity to build international consensus against Iran, a development that raises serious strategic doubts about the overall effectiveness of this move.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON

Iranian, Russian firms begin drilling in Khuzestan's Kupal oilfield

Economy Desk

Iran has launched an international drilling project at the Kupal oilfield with the participation of a Russian company and an Iranian firm, aiming to boost production capacity, improve recovery rates and support the field's sustainable development.

According to Shana, citing the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), the official start of operations has been described as a new chapter of effective international engagement in Iran's oil industry.

The project, located in Iran's southwestern Khuzestan Province, is considered one of the strategic plans in Iran's upstream oil sector and is seen as an important step toward expanding international cooperation, facilitating technology

transfer and utilizing advanced drilling technologies.

Senior technical and executive managers from the Iranian and Russian sides attended the inauguration ceremony, underlining the project's strategic importance and the determination of both parties to ensure its successful implementation. Oil industry officials said the launch of the project is the result of coordinated planning and mutual trust between Iranian and international partners.

They added that the Kupal project is not merely an operational undertaking but a strategic opportunity to enhance technical capabilities, expand specialized expertise and benefit from modern drilling technologies at the international level.

The presence of skilled human

resources, experience in executing complex drilling projects, and strict adherence to safety, quality and scheduling requirements are expected to advance the project in line with the highest technical and operational standards.

The project has also been presented as a symbol of constructive, mutually beneficial cooperation between Iranian and Russian companies, with technology transfer, maximum use of domestic expertise and the development of shared capacities cited as its main pillars.

Kupal is a major onshore oil field in Khuzestan Province, discovered in 1965 and producing since 1970. It is operated by the NIOC, with current production around 93,000 barrels per day and estimated reserves of about 5.6 billion barrels.



SHANA

Gov't spox outlines CBI priorities under Hemmati leadership



Economy Desk

Iran's government has outlined key priorities for the Central Bank of Iran under new Governor Abdolnasser Hemmati, emphasizing efforts to rebuild trust, reform core operations and strengthen the country's monetary policies, the government spokesperson said on Tuesday.

Speaking at the weekly press briefing, Fatemeh Mohajerani also expressed appreciation for the contributions of former governor Mohammad Reza Farzin, IRNA reported.

She highlighted the government's plans to advance healthcare objectives, noting, "Justice in healthcare is one of the four main pillars

of the president's agenda." These initiatives include accelerating payments to pharmaceutical and medical equipment companies through improved liquidity flow, maintaining preferential foreign currency allocations for essential medicines and treatments for specific diseases, expanding insurance coverage, and reviewing insurance commitments, particularly for critical drugs and treatments for rare and serious illnesses. Mohajerani said the measures are designed to reinforce the financial and operational foundations of the banking and healthcare sectors, ensuring that policies can be implemented in a sustainable way.

Farzin stepped down as

governor of the Central Bank of Iran earlier, after serving since December 2022.

According to Press TV, earlier reports on Monday suggested that his resignation followed protests by shop owners against the steep rise in foreign currency prices in Tehran's market.

The US dollar closed at 1.39 million rials on Monday, down from a record high of 1.44 million rials a day earlier.

The surge has led to discontent among businesses in Tehran's Grand Bazaar, which argue that rising currency prices fuel inflation and reduce customer footfall.

The newly appointed CBI chief, Hemmati, previously held the position of CBI governor from 2018 to 2021 and also served as Iran's finance minister under Pezeshkian's administration, but was dismissed following a parliamentary impeachment.

The 68-year-old economist is a professor at the University of Tehran's School of Economics and has held senior roles in major banking and insurance institutions over several decades.

Industries increasingly source power outside national grid, Tavanir official says

Economy Desk

Iran's industrial power consumers are increasingly supplying their electricity needs from sources outside the country's regional power companies and distribution firms, reflecting growing interest in alternative procurement methods, a senior official at state power company Tavanir said on Tuesday.

About 60% of the total electricity used by industrial subscribers during the past month was supplied from outside distribution companies and regional power firms, Abdolreza Fateh, director general of planning and economic affairs at Iran's Power Generation, Transmission, and Distribution Company said.

He said this shows a broad willingness among domestic industries to secure electricity from sources other than those companies, IRNA reported.

Fateh said industrial demand for purchasing power through Iran's energy exchange, signing bilateral contracts with power plants, and buying electricity from retail suppliers has been on the rise.

He added that electricity supplied to these consumers through the mentioned methods, or by building their own power plants is fully provided for under the law aimed at removing obstacles to the development of Iran's electricity in-



IRNA

dustry

Under one of the proposed optimization methods, Fateh explained, industries will be able next year to draw on the electricity they've saved during peak demand periods as "non-interruptible power," helping them avoid outages.

He also said billing procedures for industrial consumers have changed compared with the past. Under the current system, if industries secure their required electricity through the energy exchange, bilateral contracts, or retail suppliers, their bills will be calculated differently based on the energy package they purchase.

The shift comes as President Masoud Pezeshkian has urged

manufacturers to step up investment in solar power, with the government aiming to install 30,000 MW of non-fossil capacity over the next three years amid an expected power shortfall next year.

According to the Energy Ministry, Iran is expected to face a power shortfall of between 17,000 and 20,000 megawatts next year.

According to SATBA, Iran's installed renewable energy capacity has reached 3,500 megawatts, with plans to expand it to 11,000 megawatts by next summer.

Despite recent growth, clean energy sources still account for about 3.6% of Iran's total electricity generation capacity of approximately 97,909 megawatts.

Over \$2b of Iran's frozen assets to be released soon: Report

Economy Desk

An informed source on Tuesday told Fars news agency that more than \$2 billion of Iran's frozen assets have been released in a neighboring country.

Earlier on Monday night, an official from Iran's Plan and Budget Organization said that billions of dollars had entered the country. The details of the release, including the exact location of the assets and the method of transfer, were not immediately disclosed. Iran's foreign assets have been frozen largely be-



cause of Western economic sanctions, particularly US sanctions reimposed after Washington's withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal, which restrict Tehran's access to its foreign exchange reserves and oil export revenues held in banks abroad.

These sanctions have blocked Iran from freely using billions of dollars in

assets, as transactions are curtailed by penalties that deter foreign financial institutions from processing payments for Tehran.

The most notable example was about \$6 billion in oil revenues frozen in South Korean banks since 2019, which were transferred to a Qatari bank as part of a US-Iran prisoner swap deal in September 2023. However, after the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel, the US and Qatar agreed to block Iran's access to the funds, and the money has remained restricted ever since.

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Sirjan Jahan Steel Company is pleased to announce the sale and export of 20,000 tons **DIRECT REDUCED IRON (DRI)**, with the option to increase the contract quantity by up to 25% on basis of FAS at the Buyer's warehouse in Bandar Abbas, IRAN according to INCOTERMS 2020. Interested applicants are hereby invited to obtain the tender documents by visiting the official website of Sirjan Jahan Steel Company at sjSCO.ir, through the Sales and customer portal, Tender and Foreign Tender section. All documentation will be provided electronically. All bids on conformity to tender instruction should be submitted no later than **Monday, January 05, 2026.**

For more information, please contact us at:

Tel: +2186084642

Visualizing 2026: five foreign policy trends to watch

ANALYSIS As 2025 wraps up an eventful year in foreign policy, five fellows of the Council on Foreign Relations look ahead to what they'll be watching in 2026. In charts, graphics, and maps, these experts consider how the United States will navigate the growing need for critical minerals, whether tariffs will dig deeper into US consumers' pockets, if the last remaining nuclear agreement between Washington and Moscow can be saved, the ways China's electrification surge could popularize the emerging "electrostate," and why women will be the most affected by humanitarian aid cuts.



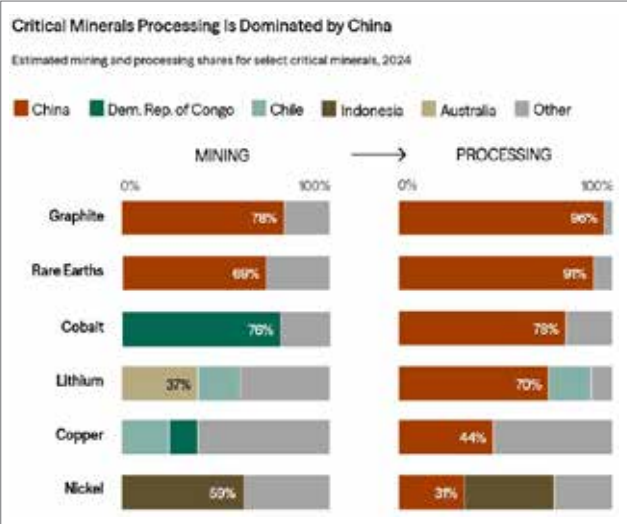
UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

Accelerating race for critical minerals



By Heidi Crebo-Rediker
Senior fellow in the Center for Geoeconomic Studies

In 2025, critical minerals reshaped geopolitics. China's near-total control over many critical minerals and rare earth elements and Beijing's willingness to weaponize that dominance put the world on notice. Under a new export control regime rolled out in October, China demonstrated its ability to restrict global access not only to the minerals themselves, but to related products and processing technology — especially to rare earth magnets — and to bring large segments of the global economy to a standstill. According to the US Geological Survey's most recent list, 60 minerals and rare earth elements are "critical" to national and economic security due to their importance in both defense and civilian industrial sectors and vulnerability to supply shocks. To compound the risk of over-dependence on China today, the International Energy Agency (IEA) projects that global demand for many of these critical minerals will rise significantly by 2030. The global critical minerals supply chain is highly concentrated, creating dangerous dependencies. The Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, is home to more than 70 percent of the world's cobalt supply. When it comes to cobalt process-



US GEOLOGICAL SURVEY 2025/IEA GLOBAL CRITICAL MINERALS OUTLOOK 2025

ing, China controls around 78 percent. For many rare earth elements, China maintains near complete control of mined and processed materials. Reliance on any one country leaves the United States vulnerable to coercion, price manipulation, and supply chain disruption. Building on efforts initiated during the first Trump administration and expanded under president Biden, the second Trump presidency has pursued two sets of policies to reduce Washington's critical minerals vulnerability. First, following a series of executive orders (E.O. 14154, E.O. 14156, E.O. 14213, E.O. 14241, E.O. 14261, and E.O. 14285) early in the Trump administration, the Departments of Commerce and Defense — alongside agencies such as the Export-Import Bank and the US International Development Finance Corporation — launched a more muscular industrial policy aimed at strengthening US mineral resilience through domestic and allied investment. These efforts deployed a broad toolkit, including loans and loan guarantees, quasi-equity and equity investments, price floors, and long-term purchase agreements. The Trump administration is expected to expand the use of these tools in 2026 to reduce US dependence on China for critical materials. Second, the White House pursued bilateral and multilateral agreements to diversify foreign mineral supplies, coordinate financing to scale production, and align regulatory frameworks and industry standards. These efforts include the Critical Minerals Action Plan agreed at the Group of Seven summit in June, the Quad Critical Minerals Initiative announced in July, and more than \$10 billion in joint commitments with Asian partners in October to finance, build, and stockpile critical mineral supplies. Together, these two lines of effort will continue to shape the Trump administration's diplomacy and industrial policy in 2026. But in a year expected to be marked by continuing change in regional security architectures and intensifying geopolitical rivalry, the pace, durability, and ultimate direction of US progress on critical minerals supply chain security remains uncertain.



POLITICS UK

More tariff costs to consumers

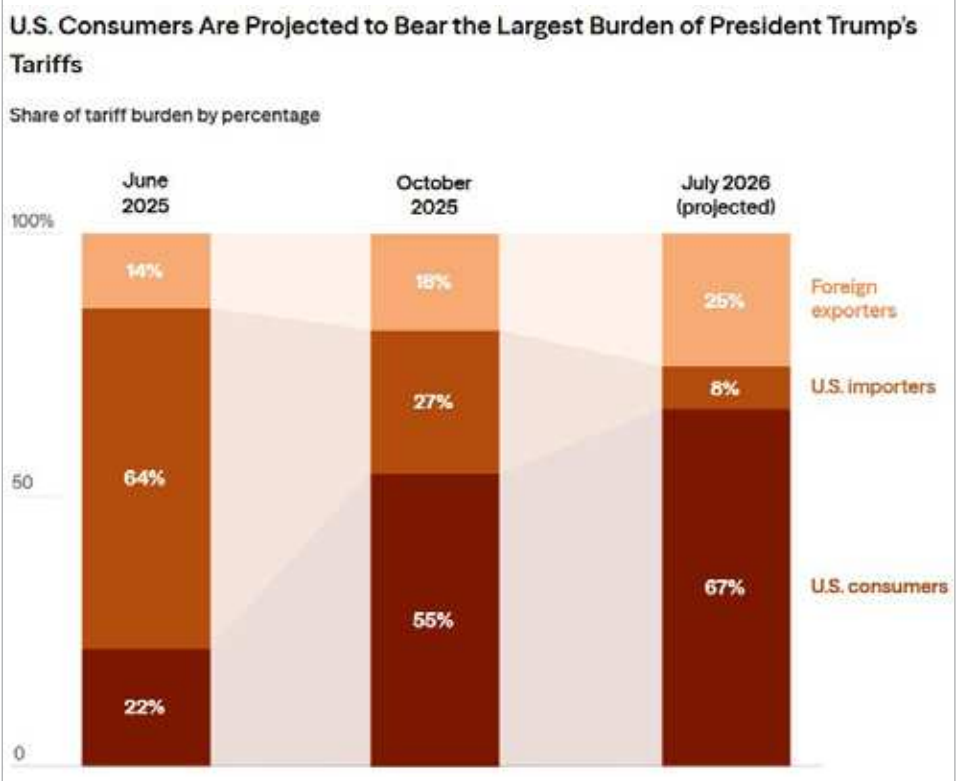


By Benn Steil
Senior fellow, director of international economics

As we move into 2026, a major unknown for the global economy is how President Trump's tariff policies will evolve and what effects they will have. Questions loom over whether the US Supreme Court will shoot down his so-called reciprocal tariffs, if trade deals will subsequently be rejigged, or if the public's concern with affordability — and industry's concern with competitiveness — will lead to a mass of exemptions.

after "Liberation Day," importers were unable to shift to lower-cost suppliers and thus had minimal leverage to compel existing foreign ones to reduce prices. Additionally, importers refrained from raising consumer prices, having built up inventory and believing — or hoping — that tariffs were merely a negotiating tool. Foreign exporters bore only 14 percent of total tariff costs in the form of lower import prices, while US consumers took on 22 percent in the form of higher retail prices. But the picture had changed considerably by October. Importers then bore only 27

gave importers and retailers good reason to pass on more of the costs to consumers. What that picture will look like next year still depends on what tariffs go up or down, and what tariffs are added or waived. But given the baseline assumption of little change, the data suggest that importers will, at mid-year, bear only about 8 percent of the tariff burden. By this time, they will have had far greater opportunity to seek out lower-cost alternative suppliers. The exporter burden should therefore rise to about 25 percent. The consumer share, meanwhile, is expected to climb to 67 percent.



GOLDMAN SACHS

An important ongoing but much-disputed question is who actually pays the president's tariffs. While in practice, tariffs are taxes paid by US importers, importers can pressure foreign exporters to cut their prices, shifting part of the burden abroad, or they can pass on the cost to American consumers through higher prices. In June, three months after Trump's April 2 "Liberation Day" tariff bombshell, US importers bore most of the tariff burden at 64 percent, according to Goldman Sachs economists. In the early months

percent of the tariff burden — less than half the June estimate. Exporters undertook a slightly higher 18 percent, and consumers suffered a much higher 55 percent — consistent with the slowly rising to clear that substantial tariffs were here to stay. That is, they were not going back down to Biden-era levels. This

In the end, US consumers will wind up shouldering most of Trump's tariffs, sending the inflation contribution of tariffs up as well. In the best case, consumers pull back on spending just enough to keep prices in check, but not enough to push the economy into recession. The worst case is "stagflation" — a combination of higher inflation and recession. The good news is that such a disaster would be wholly man-made and can therefore be un-made by slashing tariffs that don't, in fact, aid national security or competitiveness.

End of arms control

By Erin D. Dumbacher
Stanton nuclear security senior fellow

In February, the last remaining arms control treaty on limiting nuclear weapons between the United States and Russia is set to expire. The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) bilateral agreement aims to maintain strategic stability and avoid a renewed arms race. With enough nuclear weapons to hold each other at risk already, the logic goes, the two countries could each meet their national security aims with fewer than 1,550 deployed nuclear weapons. The treaty also encompassed rigorous verification methods to assure each side that the other was complying. New START established detailed limits on deployed strategic



● SIPRI YEARBOOK/FAS

delivery systems and included robust verification provisions, including on-site inspections and protections for each side's use of national technical means to monitor compliance. In 2026, the United States and Russia will hold 87 percent of

the world's nuclear bombs and warheads. With the end of New START in sight, the United States and Russia face futures with no legally binding restrictions on their nuclear arsenals and no requirements for transparency. Other

past treaties, such as Open Skies, Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces, and Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, have ceased to be in effect. Only the Non-Proliferation Treaty will impose legally binding constraints: under its terms, both the United States and Russia are recognized nuclear weapons states without limits on their deployed weapons, although each party is required to pursue negotiations "in good faith" on "cessation of the nuclear arms... disarmament". Without the constraints of New START, the United States and Russia might opt to take nuclear weapons out of their stockpiles and deploy them for prompt use. According to the Federation of American Scientists, it is possible that following the end of New START, the number of deployed warheads



● Russian Yars thermonuclear armed intercontinental ballistic missile launcher takes part in the Victory Day military parade general rehearsal on the Red Square in Moscow, Russia, on May 5, 2024.
● MAXIM SHIPENKOV/REUTER.

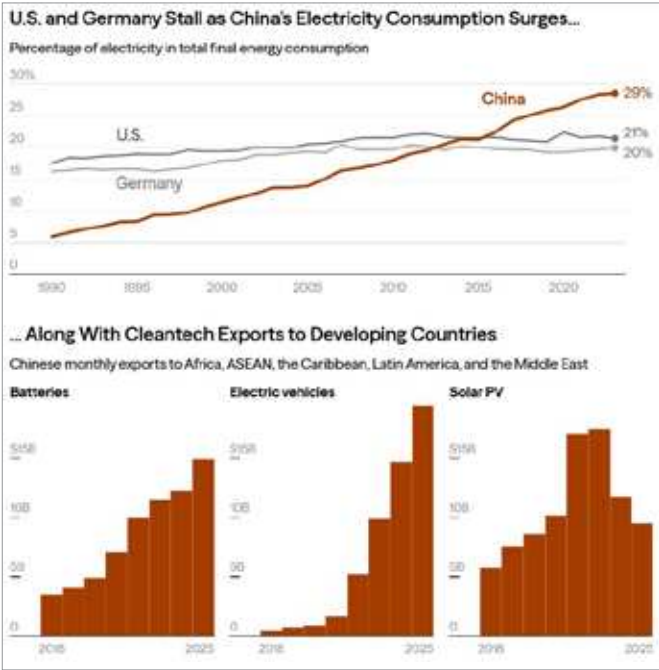
between the United States and Russia will top 6,000 within a decade. China itself is on track to have as many as 1,500 warheads by 2035. Any additional deployments of nuclear weapons from the United States or Russia could encourage states

like China to continue enhancing their own forces, making nuclear use more likely and increasing the risk of nuclear accidents. Looking into 2026, the end of controls on nuclear arms around the world seems likely.

Rise of 'electrostate'

By David M. Hart
Senior fellow for climate and energy

A new buzzword appeared this year in the global energy and climate policy lexicon: "electrostate." The term contrasts with "petrostate," and its archetype is China. One meaning of the term rests on the share of electricity in a nation's final energy consumption. High-income countries tend to use more electricity because the sectors that consume fuels directly — including agriculture, mining, and manufacturing — are a smaller slice of their economies, while the service sector, which relies primarily on electricity, is larger. By this logic, China, a middle-income country, should lag behind the United States and the European Union, but it has recently surpassed both. China is breaking the mold in part because it is rapidly electrifying transportation. More than 50 percent of passenger



● EMBER/IEA WORLD ENERGY BALANCE

vehicles sold in 2025 were propelled by electricity. That figure will hit 73 percent in 2030. Buses and motorcycles are already further down this

curve, and even trucks have begun to follow it. To support this surge in electrification, China has expanded and improved its power grid.

As recently as 15 years ago, the country suffered from power shortages. Its grid operators then embarked on a massive effort to build 60,000 kilometers of ultra-high-voltage transmission lines by the end of 2023. This growth enabled the extraordinary boom in renewable generation, which now provides more than a quarter of China's electricity, twice the share from just three years ago. China's solar industry highlights a second meaning of electrostate: one that exports energy resources. Solar panels, electric vehicles (EVs), and batteries comprise the "new trio" driving China's exports. Beijing dominates global trade in solar panels and the entire supply chain that feeds into them. Cheap Chinese panels are enabling developing nations like Brazil, Pakistan, and South Africa to reduce their reliance on imported fuels, and low-cost EV and battery exports are furthering this trend. (Indeed, the price of solar panels has dropped so quickly that the decline in export value



● People load a solar panel onto an auto rickshaw in Karachi, Pakistan, in June 2025.
● ASIF HASSAN/AFP

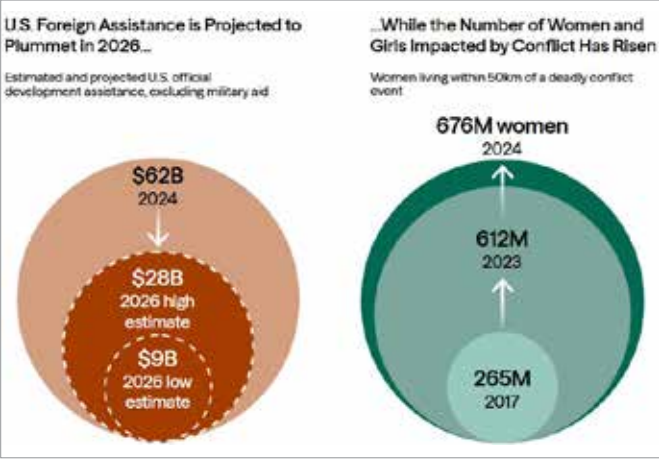
pictured in the chart masks continuing growth in exported panels' generating capacity.) These exports raise the question of whether energy importers are simply replacing dependence on petrostates like Saudi Arabia with dependence on the emerging Chinese electrostate. This argument has some validity, but there's a huge distinction: a disruption in fuel supplies has an immediate and potentially catastrophic effect on economic activity, while a disruption in solar or battery imports affects only future electric capacity. The latter is far more appealing for

many countries that now have a choice between the two. The Chinese electrostate has profound momentum, and it is spilling over the rest of the world. "The Age of Electricity," the International Energy Agency concluded in its recent World Energy Outlook report, "is here". While the petrostate may not yet be in the rearview mirror, the electrostate has begun to pass it by. As science fiction author William Gibson famously said: "The future is already here, it's just not very evenly distributed." You can find this part of the future in China today.

Women bear the brunt of US foreign aid cuts

By Linda Robinson
Senior fellow for women and foreign policy

The Donald Trump administration has slashed the United States' foreign aid this year, throwing the international aid delivery system into chaos at a time of record conflicts. Historically, the United States has represented over half of global official development assistance (ODA), providing over \$63.3 billion in 2024. For fiscal year 2025, enacted foreign aid dropped to \$38.4 billion, with additional rescissions cutting this number by at least \$9.4 billion. Funding for 2026 stands at \$28.5 billion, with estimates as low as \$8.1 billion, including rescissions and cancellations. There have been more than 350,000 deaths attributed to aid cuts since January, when Trump signed an executive order freezing foreign aid. As a result of the administration's cuts, millions of women and girls are disproportion-



● DONOR TRACKER/THE PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE OSLO/THE LANCET, MURPHY, MAUREEN ET AL.

ately suffering and face direct threats to their health and security. Bearing the brunt of war, women and girls rely on humanitarian aid for survival. The United Nations estimates that 676 million women live in conflict zones, where instability increases conflict-related sexual violence and food and economic insecurity. Millions more displaced and refugee

women are more likely to experience violence and abuse. In Sudan, for example, nearly 11 million women and girls are food insecure, and women in remote and besieged areas risk sexual violence and abduction. And in Afghanistan, women lack the ability to work or travel, and more than two-thirds of women-led households are forced to marry their daughters

off for survival. Nearly 224 million women globally lack access to family planning methods and are reliant on aid to access health care, including sexual and reproductive health resources. Funding cuts have cut over 90 percent of all maternal, child, and reproductive health care assistance provided by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and, earlier this year, the State Department destroyed \$9.7 million worth of contraceptives for women in low-income countries. Estimates show that if US funding is not renewed at the level of fiscal year 2024, millions of women will be denied contraceptives, resulting in more than 17 million unintended pregnancies, and more than 34,000 pregnancy-related deaths. Development aid and humanitarian assistance have been hit the hardest. The Trump administration provided small amounts of disaster relief in March following devastating earthquakes in Myanmar and



● People wait for an HIV test at a clinic in Tanzania, supported by USAID.
● JAKE LYELL/ALAMY

sponsored some public health assistance to the Philippines and emergency food aid — but rescinded \$5 billion in other aid in August. Except for some critical health funding, including President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) aid for HIV treatments, US development aid has been largely eliminated, and USAID has been shuttered. The repercussions are being compounded as other countries have followed suit. In addition to the United

States, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom have reduced their aid this year, for the second year in a row. A recent study estimated that US and European aid cuts could cost an additional 22.6 million lives by 2030 if the trend is not reversed. While budgetary talks are still underway, there is little sign that 2026 will see a comeback in foreign aid.

The article was first published by the Council on Foreign Relations.

Saravi proud of ‘milestone’ AIPS Athlete of the Year nomination

Sports Desk

Iranian wrestler Mohammad-Hadi Saravi described his inclusion on the shortlist for the AIPS Best Male Athlete of the Year award as a “great honor,” saying he hopes to build on the “milestone in my career” with further success in future competitions. The Greco-Roman standout was among 53 athletes nominated for the prestigious award, which was voted on by a record 836 members of the International Sports Press Association (AIPS) from 121 countries. Swedish pole vaulter Armand Duplantis, who shattered the world record four times over the past year, was the runaway winner of the poll. Nevertheless, Saravi said he was proud to see his name “on the same list as football stars such as Ousmane Dembélé, Kylian Mbappé, Mohamed Salah and Lamine Yamal, as well as other prominent champions from various sports.” “I am grateful to God that this important milestone came during my career. As a representative of Iranian wrestling and sport, I have been nominated for one of the world’s most prestigious in-

ternational sports awards – an honor decided by leading sports media from around the globe,” Saravi was quoted as saying on the official website of the Iranian Wrestling Federation. “On the path I began, I am thankful that it has been accompanied by world and Olympic titles, and today my name, as an Iranian and a representative of our country’s wrestling, stands among the greats of world sport. “I hope the successes I have achieved in recent years will continue, and that I can remain a worthy representative of the dear people of Iran on various sporting stages. I sincerely thank my fellow Iranians for their support regarding this nomination.” An Olympic gold medalist in Paris last year, Saravi proved to be the wrestler to beat in the 97kg category, posting a 10-0 record en route to gold medals at three major tournaments in 2025, including the world title in September. He opened the international season with a dominant run at the Asian Championships in March, claiming three superiority victories without conceding a single point to secure the third continental gold of his career.

Saravi then defeated Russia’s Artur Sargsian, competing as a neutral athlete, 3-1 in the final in Zagreb to claim his second world gold after his 2021 triumph, before rounding out the season with a 5-1 victory over Azerbaijan’s Murad Ahmadiyev in the final of the Islamic Solidarity Games in November. The gold-laden season earned Saravi a nomination for the UWW Most Dominant Greco-Roman Wrestler of 2025 award, though he ultimately lost out to fellow Iranian world and Olympic champion Saeid Esmaili. Behind Duplantis in the poll was Spanish tennis player Carlos Alcaraz, who captured a Tour-leading eight titles in 2025, including two Grand Slams at Roland Garros and the US Open, and finished the season as world No. 1 with a Tour-best 71 match wins. French forward Dembélé placed third after a fairytale 2024/25 campaign in which he won six major trophies with Paris Saint-Germain, including Ligue 1 and the UEFA Champions League, while also claiming the Ballon d’Or and The Best FIFA Men’s Player award. The AIPS Best Female Athlete of



Mohammad-Hadi Saravi celebrates with the Iranian flag after winning the Greco-Roman Wrestling World Championships in Zagreb, Croatia, on September 20, 2025.

97kg gold medal at the

the Year award went to Spanish footballer Aitana Bonmatí, fol-

lowed by Kenyan long-distance runner Beatrice Chebet and

Belarusian tennis star Aryna Sabalenka.

AFC Champions League Two:

Sepahan to face Al Ahli, Esteghlal given Al Hussein test in last 16



Sepahan players celebrate a goal during a 2-0 victory over Al Hussein in the AFC Champions League Two at the Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium, Isfahan, Iran, on November 25, 2025.

ARYA JAFARI/AFC

Sports Desk

Persian Gulf Pro League club Sepahan will face Qatar’s Al Ahli, while Esteghlal will take on Jordan’s Al Hussein in the round of 16 of the AFC Champions League Two. The draw for the knockout phase took place at the AFC headquarters in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday, with the 16 remaining teams discovering their opponents in Asia’s second-tier club competition. Both Iranian sides will host the first leg of their two-legged ties on February 10-11, with the return matches scheduled for a week later. Sepahan secured second

place behind Al Hussein in Group C with a 2-0 home win over the Jordanian side in November. The group featured only three teams after Indian champion Mohun Bagan SG was expelled from the competition for refusing to travel to Isfahan, citing safety concerns. Al Ahli topped Group B with 10 points, recording two wins and four draws. Esteghlal, meanwhile, endured a dreadful start to its campaign, suffering back-to-back defeats – including a 7-1 humiliation at the hands of UAE side Al Wasl – but still managed to advance behind the Emirati club. The Tehran side sealed qualification with a

comprehensive 3-0 away victory over Bahrain’s Al Muharraq in a must-win game on the final day of the group stage last Wednesday. Fans in Iran could be treated to an all-Iranian clash in the quarterfinals should both Sepahan and Esteghlal progress. Elsewhere in the draw, Cristiano Ronaldo’s Al Nassr, which won Group D with a perfect record of six wins, was pitted against FC Arkadag. The Saudi heavyweight scored a tournament-high 22 goals and conceded just two, while Turkmenistan’s Arkadag netted five and conceded six in six group

matches. Unbeaten Al Wasl will face Iraq’s Al Zawraa SC, the runner-up in Group D. In the East region, Australia’s Macarthur FC will meet Thailand’s Bangkok United, while Japan’s Gamba Osaka will be confident of its chances against South Korea’s Pohang Steelers after advancing from Group F with a perfect record. Indonesia’s Persib Bandung will go head-to-head with Thailand’s Ratchaburi FC. The last-16 ties will be followed by the quarterfinals in March and the semifinals in April, with the tournament culminating in a single-leg West-meets-East final on May 16.

Sports Desk

Mahdi Taj, president of the Iranian Football Federation, has warned that domestic matches “will be suspended or even abandoned under international rules” in response to insulting ethnic chants in Iranian stadiums. Taj made the remarks after Mohammadreza Zonouzi, owner of Tabriz-based club Tractor, had threatened to withdraw his team from the Persian Gulf Pro League and called on Taj to resign, citing the federation’s “silence and negligence” over repeated abuse of the club’s Turkish ethnic supporters during domestic matches. The most recent incident occurred in an away fixture against Shams Azar in Qazvin on Friday. Tractor has blamed Persepolis supporters for the chants, as tensions between the two clubs have intensified over the past two years following the departure of Persepolis stars Alireza

Beiranvand, Mahdi Torabi and Danial Esmailifar to Tractor ahead of last season – a move that helped the Tabriz side secure its first Iranian top-flight title in May. Tractor and Persepolis met in the Hazfi Cup at Tabriz’s Yadegar-e Imam Stadium on December 18 – a match Tractor won on penalties – during which members of the Capital Reds’ camp, most notably Iranian football legend and Tabriz-born Karim Baqeri – now a member of the club’s coaching staff – were subjected to slurs and insults from the home crowd throughout the game. “Regulations which were previously not enforced for various reasons will now be applied strictly and without leniency, including measures against ethnic, provocative and abusive chants that could lead to matches being suspended or even abandoned under international rules,” Taj said on the sidelines of a meeting between

Iranian Sports Minister Ahmad Donyamali and executives from the league’s so-called ‘Big Four’ – Persepolis, Esteghlal, Tractor and Sepahan. “Unfortunately, some clubs and their affiliates create situations that inflame the atmosphere inside stadiums, while fans attend matches to enjoy football,” he added. “The outcome of today’s meeting is that we expect to see a reduction in such behavior in the near future.” Taj further explained that a disciplinary committee meeting attended by all judicial bodies of the federation, as well as security officials, agreed that regulations previously left unenforced would now be implemented without exception. “This includes dealing with ethnic, inflammatory and insulting chants. In line with international regulations, if such behavior continues, referees are obliged to stop the match and may even abandon it,” he said.

Football chief warns of ‘match abandonment’ over ethnic abuse



Tractor winger Mahdi Torabi (red) is seen in action against Persepolis fullback Yaqoub Barajeh during a Hazfi Cup game at the Yadegar-e Imam Stadium, Tabriz, Iran, on December 18, 2025.

IRNA

Iranica Desk

Recent rainfall has transformed the landscape of Iran's Lut Desert, marking a rare event that occurs only once every few years and highlighting the natural dynamism of this UNESCO-listed site, according to the director of the Lut Desert World Heritage Site. Hossein Eslami said the recent rains have had a significant impact on the world heritage area, explaining that the downpours have filled vast sand fields with water and created favorable conditions for a remarkable revival of plant and animal species. He added that the replenishment of underground aquifers, along with the formation of small seasonal ponds along the edges of sand dunes, has brought an unprecedented sense of freshness and vitality to the Rig-e Yalan region, chtn.ir reported. He noted that the emergence of this striking and rarely seen landscape has attracted several



hundred tourists, researchers, and nature enthusiasts to the area. During this brief but valu-

able period, visitors have been able to witness a rare scene reminiscent of the Lut Desert's

ancient quasi-sea, observing the unusual and visually stunning coexistence of water and

sand in the heart of what is known as the world's hottest desert.

Emphasizing the natural and ecological significance of the phenomenon, Eslami stated that the recent rains are a clear symbol of divine mercy and the Lut Desert's inherent capacity for regeneration. He stressed that this event serves as a powerful reminder of the need for informed conservation, responsible tourism management, and the continued protection of this unique world heritage site — whose survival depends on respect for the delicate balance of nature. The Lut Desert, inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2016, is renowned for its extreme climatic conditions, vast sand seas, dramatic yardangs, and record-breaking land surface temperatures. Scientists regard it as a natural laboratory for studying desert geomorphology and climate processes, while its rare moments of transformation after rainfall offer valuable insights into resilience and life in one of the harshest environments on Earth.

Junipers stand as guardians of history in Alborz Province

Iranica Desk

The Head of the Department for Habitat Protection and Management at the Alborz Provincial Office of the Department of Environment stated that juniper trees are widely recognized as the green emblem of the province. By thriving within protected areas, these trees preserve a living legacy of Iran's history in the heart of the mountains. Hamzeh Mashayekhi, referring to the natural distribution of juniper trees across Alborz Province, said, "Juniper is not only one of the most valuable plant species in the province, but it is also recognized as the province's official botanical symbol. The presence of ancient junipers within protected areas underscores the ecological significance of this species in the Alborz ecosystem." He added, "With its high mountains, floodplains, and diverse climatic conditions, Alborz Prov-

ince ranks among the richest regions in the country in terms of plant diversity. These conditions provide an ideal environment for the growth of valuable species such as juniper." Mashayekhi noted that studies indicate approximately 65 percent of Alborz Province's land is covered by rangelands, with 17 distinct rangeland types identified. This diversity in rangelands supports the survival of numerous plant and animal species throughout the region, chtn.ir wrote. He further explained, "The province's forest cover, which falls within Iran's vegetative zone, is mostly sparse and scattered, appearing predominantly in the northern areas. Nevertheless, valuable tree and shrub species such as wild pistachio, hawthorn, barberry, wild almond, and especially juniper thrive in these areas, playing a crucial role in maintaining the stability of local ecosystems."

Referring to the Southern Alborz Protected Area, Mashayekhi said, "Although this region, which spans approximately 64,000 hectares, is primarily rangeland, valuable trees and shrubs, both naturally occurring and planted, are present throughout the area. The presence of junipers here holds not only ecological importance but also provides a unique natural attraction for nature-loving tourists." Regarding the environmental characteristics of juniper, he explained, "Juniper, belonging to the cypress family, is an evergreen and resilient tree that grows at altitudes above 2,500 meters. It can withstand harsh winter cold, drought, and water scarcity, which gives it a special and prominent role in the Alborz Mountains." Mashayekhi highlighted one of the most remarkable junipers located northeast of Shahrestanak village. "This tree is over 2,800 years old, stands

17 meters tall, and, with its massive trunk, displays a living representation of Iran's history and natural heritage. Known as 'Pir Todar,' it has remained green from the Achaemenid era to the present day, representing not only a natural phenomenon but also a living genetic reserve and a historical legacy. Tourists and nature enthusiasts visiting this tree can experience a rare and profound connection between history and nature." Addressing the threats faced by junipers, he said, "Although winter is generally a dormant period for plants, juniper forests are particularly vulnerable during this season. Illegal logging, overgrazing, and uninformed harvesting are among the most serious threats to this valuable species. The law banning the cutting of juniper trees, enacted in the early 1990s, reflects the critical environmental importance of this species and underscores the necessity of its protection."



He continued, "Educating local communities and visitors about the ecological and historical value of junipers is essential for the conservation of this rare species. Only through increased awareness and adherence to environmental principles can we ensure that these ancient trees are preserved for

future generations." Mashayekhi concluded, "The junipers of Alborz stand like green guardians in the mountains. With continued and proper protection, they will remain for centuries as symbols of resilience, patience, and the deep connection between nature and Iran's history."

Semnan preserves its ancient Para water system

Iranica Desk

Semnan, with its temperate-arid climate and proximity to Mahdishahr, Damghan, Sorkheh, and Iran's central desert, has long provided fertile ground for the emergence of ancient innovations. Para is one of the most remarkable manifestations of this ingenuity, rooted in the city's natural conditions and in the ways local people have historically adapted to their environment. Javad Tayebi, a journalist, noted that although Semnan lies between the humid region of Mazandaran and the arid expanse of the Dasht-e Kavir (Kavir Desert) and might therefore be expected to enjoy a mild and pleasant climate, the great height of the Alborz Mountains in this area prevents moisture and vapor from the Caspian Sea from passing through. As a result, dry winds and the intense heat of the desert freely influence the city's weather, making winters cold and summers excessively hot, while rainfall occurs only rarely during winter and early spring, according to chtn.ir. Drinking water in Semnan is supplied from springs in the Shahmirzad and surrounding



farmlands, while in other parts of the city it comes from qanats. Overall, water scarcity is evident throughout the region. The unpaved road from Damghan extends nearly to the Kavir Desert, while the unpaved road from Semnan to Damghan passes roughly through the middle of the city, and the railway runs close to its far end. There are no permanent rivers in the area; only dry mountain streams flow during rainfall, producing flash floods that eventually reach the Dasht-e Kavir. The most important of these is the Golrudbar River, which has several branches. Given these conditions, the an-

cestors of Semnan sought innovative ways to maximize the limited water resources in this desert city and established a traditional water distribution system. The traditional water distribution system in Semnan dates back approximately 1,000 years. About seven hundred years ago, Sheikh Ala al-Dowleh Semnani, a leader during the Ilkhanid period who later became a renowned mystic in Iran, organized and engineered this system — a system that continues to function to this day. The water distributor, locally known in Semnan's tradition-



al irrigation system as Para, is located north of the city. Due to the sloping terrain, water from the Golrudbar River flows rapidly into the first reservoir. There are six of these reservoirs, each positioned at a higher level than the previous one, forming a stepped arrangement. Along the length of each reservoir, wooden channels are installed, through which water flows into the next reservoir. There are six such channels in total. As water enters each reservoir, its speed and intensity gradually decrease, so that by the last reservoir, almost all of the water's initial force is dissi-

pated, and it flows at a normal, gentle pace. The system works as follows: water from the Golrudbar River enters the city from the north and then flows into six water storage reservoirs, each of which has a name derived from the historical neighborhoods to which its water is directed. The system, with its highly complex and efficient rules for dividing water, managed through careful calculations and an active administrative organization, ensured that the needs of farmers and residents were consistently met. Importantly, the system was never under the direct control of rul-

ing governments. Instead, it was always managed by local farmers and residents. In fact, in this system, water had a legal identity, similar to movable and immovable property, and could be bought and sold. Those entitled to it held official registration documents. This ownership, like that of a house, garden, or land, could be transferred through sale, lease, or inheritance, and often became part of a dowry for brides. The irrigation system of Semnan is based on reservoirs and a rotational schedule for water allocation to each individual, following a specific organizational system. Its method of water distribution is older than systems such as the Zayandeh Rud River water distribution in Isfahan, which is attributed to Sheikh Baha'i. What distinguishes Semnan's system from similar ones in other Iranian cities is that, despite gradual developments over the centuries, it is still in use by the local population today. Para (the water distributor) dates back to the post-Islamic historical period and is located in the Golestan Township of Semnan. This site was registered as one of Iran's National Heritage Sites on April 29, 2003.



Tehran Symphony Orchestra performs in Soleimani tribute concert



Arts & Culture Desk

The Tehran Symphony Orchestra performed the symphonic work 'Iran-Mard' at Tehran's Vahdat Hall on Tuesday, commemorating the sixth anniversary of the martyrdom of General Qasem Soleimani, in an event attended by Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Abbas Salehi and senior cultural officials. Conducted by Nasir Heidarian, the concert featured original compositions by Arman Mehraban and vocals by Amirhossein Samiei. It was organized with the participation of the Foun-

dition for the Preservation and Publication of Martyr Soleimani's Works and the Ministry of Culture, framing the program as a state-backed cultural tribute rooted in national identity and collective memory, IRNA reported. The performance coincided with anniversary commemorations of Soleimani, the former commander of Iran's Quds Force, who was killed in a US drone strike near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020. Iranian officials have since elevated his legacy through a sustained calendar of cultural, artistic, and media

events. Addressing the audience briefly, Salehi cast Soleimani as a contemporary embodiment of "Iran-mardi," a Persian ideal of moral courage and public duty stretching from classical literature to modern history. He linked the concept to figures in Ferdowsi's 'Shahnameh,' arguing that Iranian cultural production has long served as a vehicle for reinforcing social cohesion during periods of external pressure. "The durability and dignity of Iran across centuries has relied not only on institutions, but on exemplary in-

dividuals," Salehi said, calling Soleimani "one of the peaks" of that tradition. His remarks avoided detailed political commentary, focusing instead on symbolism, ethics, and continuity in Iranian cultural narratives. Zeinab Soleimani, the general's daughter, also addressed the ceremony, thanking artists and institutions for what she described as sustained efforts to preserve her father's legacy through cultural expression. She highlighted music and the arts as effective tools for transmitting historical memory to younger generations.

On the eve of Christian New Year

Minister frames Armenians as 'part of Iran'

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's minister of cultural heritage, tourism and handicrafts said on Tuesday that the country's Armenian community is an integral, rooted part of the Iranian nation, not a minority, as he visited Tehran's historic St. Sarkis Cathedral ahead of Christmas and the New Year. Reza Salehi-Amiri made the remarks during a visit to the cathedral and the Armenian Diocese Council of Tehran and Northern Iran, where he conveyed President Masoud Pezeshkian's greetings to Iran's Christian community, IRNA reported. He said equal dignity, security and citizenship rights for all Iranians form a core principle of the Islamic Republic's religious and political framework. Salehi-Amiri described Iran's Armenians as a long-established, culturally influential community living across Tehran, Isfahan, western provinces and other regions "in their own home," stressing that governance in Iran rejects distinctions based on religion, ethnicity, race or language. He framed peaceful coexistence not as a slogan but as a strategic pillar of statecraft, rooted in shared monotheistic values between Islam and Christianity. The visit also focused on heritage policy. Officials said more than 500 sites linked



to the Armenian community, including churches, schools and cemeteries, have been documented and registered on Iran's national heritage list. Provincial authorities, particularly in East and West Azarbaijan, have expanded restoration programs for Armenian religious sites, including UNESCO-listed monasteries such as St. Thaddeus, St. Stepanos and the Chapel of Dzordzor. In Isfahan alone, representatives said 13 churches have undergone restoration. Mohammad-Hassan Talebian, a senior heritage official, said the ministry is prioritizing tourism infrastructure upgrades around the three UNESCO-listed Armenian monasteries to lift visitor capacity and improve access. He also pointed to plans to convert a historic Armenian school on Tehran's Si-e Tir Street into a museum, reinforcing the corridor's branding as a multifaith cultural axis.

Armenian parliamentary representatives welcomed the visit, calling it a signal of sustained state backing for the preservation of Christian religious heritage. Church officials said the Armenian community stands ready to deepen co-operation on conservation and cultural tourism. Beyond domestic policy, Salehi-Amiri pointed to improving Iran-Armenia relations, saying cross-border tourism flows have risen over the past year. He said recent bilateral agreements have eased land and air travel, supporting people-to-people exchanges and cultural connectivity between the two neighbors. Iran has sought to diversify regional tourism inflows as part of its broader services-sector strategy, with officials viewing faith-based and cultural tourism as a resilient niche amid external economic pressures.

London to screen restored Iranian New Wave classics

Arts & Culture Desk

London's Barbican cinema will screen newly restored works by leading figures of Iran's New Wave cinema from February 4 to 26, including films by Bahram Beyzai, Dariush Mehrjui, Abbas Kiarostami, Masoud Kimiai, and Ebrahim Golestan. The retrospective, titled 'Masterpieces of Iranian New Wave Cinema,' brings together landmark features and shorts that helped propel Iranian cinema onto the global cultural map, showcasing pristine restorations of films that blended social realism, literary depth and formal innovation, ISNA reported. The program includes Beyzai's 'Cherikhe-ye Tara' (Ballad of Tara) and 'The Travelers,' screened in tribute to the influential playwright and filmmaker, who died recently at age 87 and is widely regarded as a founding architect of the New Wave movement. Beyzai's work, rooted in Persian mythology and social critique, reshaped narrative cinema in Iran from the late 1960s onward. Also featured are 'Secrets of the Treasure of the Jinn Valley' and three short films by pioneering director and writer Ebrahim Golestan, 'The Hills of Marlik,' 'A Fire' and 'The Proposal,' works that fused documentary precision with poetic minimalism and exerted lasting influence on generations of filmmakers. The lineup further includes Mehrjui's 'The Postman,' Kimiai's seminal crime



drama 'The Deer,' and 'Marjan' by Shahla Riahi, one of Iran's earliest female directors. Additional restored titles by Kiarostami and documentarian Kamran Shirdel will be screened, with full details to be announced by organizers. Many of the films are being shown in newly restored versions, underscoring a broader international push to preserve Iran's cinematic heritage and reintroduce foundational works to contemporary audiences. The New Wave, which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, marked a decisive break from commercial formulas, foregrounding social realism, allegory and philosophical inquiry. The London program is curated in collaboration with film historian Ehsan Khoshbakht and the Iran Heritage Foundation, according to ISNA, and is expected to draw scholars, critics and cinephiles interested in the cultural and historical roots of modern Iranian cinema.

To feed, or not to feed, that is the question

By Mirsiavash Ejlali
Ecologist

PERSPECTIVE EXCLUSIVE

The typical scene on the streets of Tehran, from the north all the way to the south: People, young or old, feeding groups of stray cats. These cats are so accustomed to humans that they rarely show any fear, readily approach us, rub themselves against our legs, and mew persistently for food. With their innocent, colorful eyes and marvelously painted coats alongside mellow meows and purrs, these cats are totally irresistible! Anyone could be tempted to feed these adorable animals! Right? But beware! Feeding stray cats on a regular basis is not a good idea at all. Why?

Less genetically fit cat populations in the long run: Those cats not well-adapted to the urban ecosystem behaviorally, morphologically, or physiologically, including sick and weak cats, will be eliminated by natural selection, resulting in genetically healthier and fitter populations. Feeding and taking care of the maladapted or sick cats on a regular basis will result in less genetically fit populations of these animals. Kittens do not master their hunting lessons: Female cats teach their kittens how to hunt adeptly. Kittens need to practice their hunting skills, just as you needed to practice how to walk when you were a toddler. As people feed the mother, the kittens, instead of learning and practicing their hunting lessons, from a very young age, lose their fear of humans and learn from their mother how to get food easily

by just a simple mew. The spread of diseases such as toxoplasmosis accelerates: Feeding results in all the cats gathering in one place. Being in close proximity means the spread of diseases such as toxoplasmosis; this, in turn, increases the transmission of this disease from cats to humans and pets. Why should they go hunting when people feed them regularly? Cats play a highly important role in the urban ecosystem, controlling the population of small-bodied rodents such as house mice, butterflies, and small reptiles, especially hunting the weak, old, or sick ones. After all, that is why wild cats were domesticated long ago. Stray cats, however, will not go after the above-mentioned prey items if food is provided by people. Also note that apart from individual learning, social learning plays a critical part in shaping behavior

in cats; that is, they learn from each other. So, when they notice that other cats in their neighbors get food easily without going through the hassles of hunting, even the more reserved cats get more dependent on humans feeding them. Population explosion: Stray cats have a high reproductive capacity. Female and male cats are reproductively mature by 6 and 8 months, respectively. Genetic and environmental factors, mainly resource availability, define the number of times the female gives birth and her litter size. Thanks to us, there are abundant sources for these cats, and they can give birth far more frequently and each time with a large litter size. Not surprisingly, the population of stray cats in Tehran has been skyrocketing over the last decade, reaching 400,000 in 2024. Unfortunately, when the populations of stray cats are not

controlled, they will ultimately face mistreatment. Still, if you are not convinced and their mewling steals your heart, at least do not feed them on a regular basis. If you really love feeding a cat every day, get a pet and take care of her/him very well! Let nature take over, and cats play their indispensable role in our urban ecosystem! As a side note, feeding by people is not the only culprit, but it has certainly exacerbated this problem. Unless the Tehran Municipality, NGOs, the Department of Environment, and ordinary people work hand in hand, this problem will linger on. Neutering, improvement in waste management, such as suitable covers for trash bins, and amendment of the pertinent laws and regulations are the key strategies that need to be adopted by the authorities.