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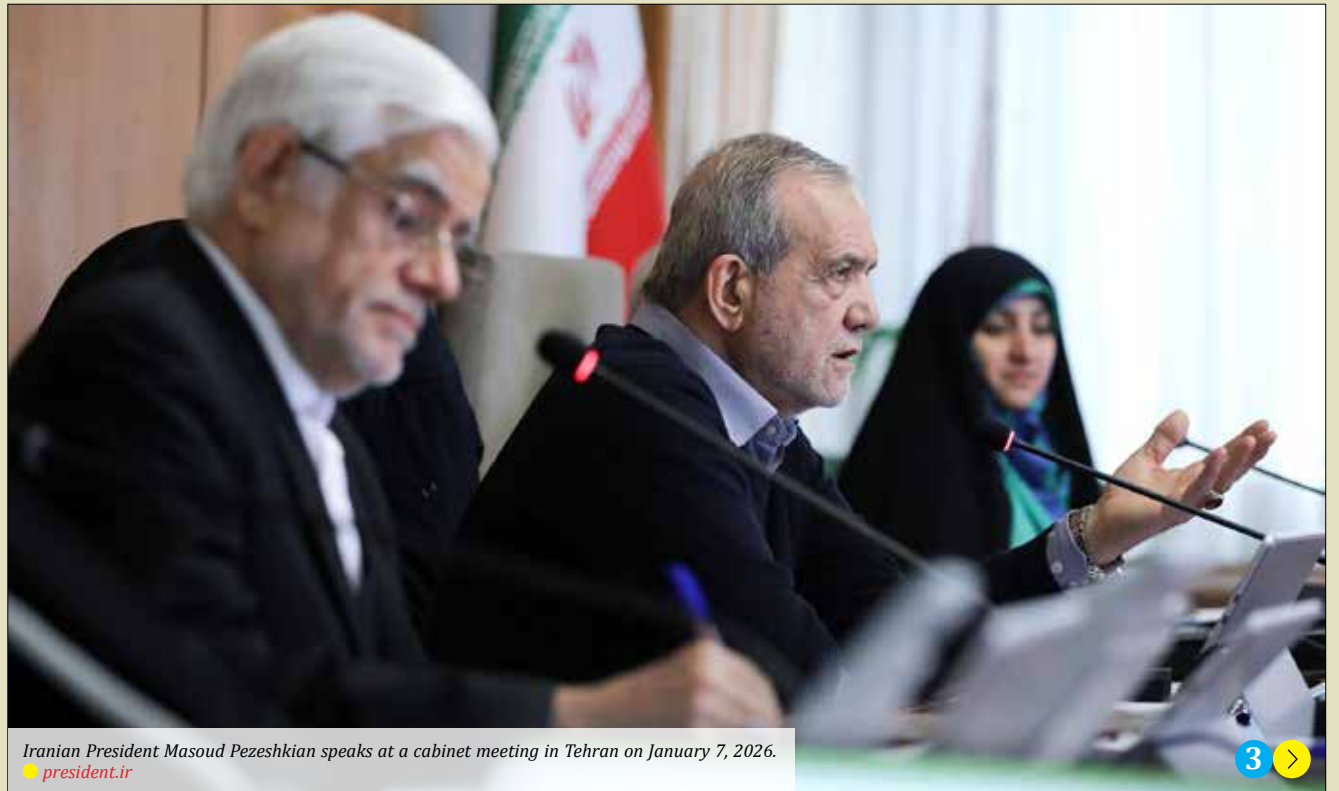
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Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian speaks at a cabinet meeting in Tehran on January 7, 2026.
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Rejecting the Russian peace



By Parham Pourramezan
Political science researcher

OPINION
EXCLUSIVE

The crisis between Ukraine and Russia has its roots in a set of historical, security, and geopolitical factors that began with the collapse of the Soviet Union and intensified with the expansion of Western influence in Eastern Europe. Russia's primary concern is that Ukraine may fall within the Western and NATO sphere of influence—a scenario that Moscow perceives as a direct threat to its national security. On the other hand, since 2014, Ukraine has pursued closer ties with the West, aiming to consolidate its political inde-

pendence and territorial integrity. This strategic divergence ultimately led to a large-scale military conflict, which not only challenged the sovereignty and territorial boundaries of the two countries but also disrupted the European security order. At a broader level, the Ukraine crisis has become a stage for a larger confrontation between Russia and the West, in which both sides employ military, economic, and diplomatic tools to advance their objectives. For Russia, maintaining influence over Ukraine is vital for strategic survival and preventing geopolitical encirclement. For the West, supporting Ukraine means preventing the forcible alteration of borders and upholding an international order based on rules. The outcome of this con-

frontation is a protracted and attritional war that has made achieving sustainable peace difficult, with ongoing implications for energy security, global economy, and the international balance of power. In recent days, several important developments have occurred in the Ukraine-Russia crisis. Simultaneously with the initiation of peace negotiations under US pressure, Russia stated that the European-proposed framework for ending the war is "unconstructive" and unacceptable to Moscow. At the same time, Russia launched heavy missile and drone attacks on the Ukrainian capital overnight. This simultaneity of diplomatic talks and ongoing bombardment indicates that even amidst dialogue, the war has not effectively paused,

and the prospects for peace remain fragile. In this brief analysis, I attempt to elucidate and examine Russia's approach to peace in this crisis. Within the framework of its security-centered perspective, Russia considers peace with Ukraine possible only if a set of strategic conditions is met. The most significant condition is the recognition of Russian control over occupied territories, including Crimea and parts of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson. Moscow also demands permanent neutrality for Ukraine and the formal abandonment of any attempts to join NATO. From Russia's viewpoint, Ukraine's military structure must be "redesigned" to ensure it poses no threat—a concept framed in terms such as "demilitarization" or "neutralization of threats." Additionally, Russia expects Ukraine to waive all in-

ternational legal claims against Moscow and provide guarantees that Russian territory or territories under Russian control will not be targeted militarily. Furthermore, Russia insists on the lifting of Western sanctions and the return or release of Russian assets seized in Europe and the United States, as Moscow considers peace without the removal of economic pressure "unrealistic." The Kremlin also emphasizes that any agreement must be "bilateral and binding," ensuring Russia's long-term security, including limitations on Western military presence along Europe's eastern borders. These conditions indicate that Russia perceives peace not as a return to the pre-war status quo but as the consolidation of its geopolitical gains; peace is achievable only if Moscow's territorial and strategic objectives are recognized.

The conditions Russia proposes for peace are unacceptable to Ukraine and many Western countries, as they effectively require the acceptance of territorial changes through force. For Ukraine, formally relinquishing occupied territories would not only undermine national sovereignty and territorial integrity but also pose a dangerous precedent for future security, signaling that Russia could apply military pressure whenever it deems necessary. The West views these conditions as violating a fundamental principle of the international order: "no territorial changes through aggression." Accepting such peace could set a precedent whereby states could create new political realities by force and then seek recognition from the international community.

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Iran warns of 'stronger response' to renewed Israeli aggression

International Desk

Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref said on Wednesday that the Israeli regime will receive a stronger response if it launches new strikes on Iran. "The usurping Zionist regime does not dare to repeat the attack on Iran, and if it makes this mistake, it will receive a stronger response," Iran's vice president said during a meeting held in Tehran to review the promotion of science and technology in the country. His remarks come amid menacing blusters and caveats by Israeli and American officials in the wake of the eruption of protests in Iran in response to the devaluation of national currency. Protests in Iran broke out last week after shopkeepers in Tehran temporarily closed their businesses to protest the sharp fall of the national currency, which plunged to record lows against the US dollar.

Iranian officials have acknowledged the economic pressure facing the public and said peaceful protests are legitimate. At the same time, they have warned that foreign-backed elements are seeking to exploit the situation and fuel violence. Iranian Army's chief commander also warned that escalating rhetoric and threats by enemies will be regarded as a direct threat and will not go unanswered, noting that any mistake by adversaries would trigger a decisive response. "We will cut off the hand of any aggressor," Major General Amir Hatami told students at the Army Command and Staff University on Wednesday, days after US President Donald Trump explicitly threatened Iran with military aggression. If Iran kills protesters, the United States will come to their rescue. "We are locked and loaded and ready to go," Trump wrote on Truth Social on Friday. General Hatami added that Iran considers the intensification of the enemies'



Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref (R) speaks during a meeting held in Tehran on January 7, 2026 to review the promotion of national science and technology.
● otaghiranonline.ir

rhetoric against the Iranian nation as a threat and will not leave its continuation unanswered. Hatami underlined that any hostile action against Iran would have far-reaching consequences, stressing that Iran's Army will act with full force to defend the country's independence and territorial integrity. Hatami emphasized that Iran's Armed Forces are now far more prepared than in the pre-war period, warning that if enemies make a miscalculation, they will face a stronger and more decisive response. He was referring to a US-Israeli aggression against Iran in June, which killed at least 1,064 people and targeted military and civilian infrastructure in 12 days.



On June 24, Iran managed to impose a halt to the aggression after conducting waves of successful retaliatory operations. Referring to protests in Iran, Hatami said such protests have no connection to the US president or the "criminal prime minister of the Israeli regime [Benjamin

Netanyahu]". The army chief said protests are a normal and natural phenomenon in any country, but rapidly turning protests into riots is abnormal and inconsistent with Iran's "cultured nation," adding that such developments are the result of enemy planning.

Araghchi highlights Iran-Lebanon motivation to expand ties FM to visit Beirut today

International Desk

Iran's foreign minister on Wednesday described his upcoming visit to Lebanon as a step toward strengthening ties with the Lebanese government and political establishment. "This motivation exists both on our part and on the Lebanese one. An economic delegation will accompany me to strengthen trade and commercial ties ... we will promote relations to a strong and independent level, free from outside interference," Araghchi told reports after a cabinet meeting. The Iranian foreign minister is scheduled to visit Lebanon today. The meeting comes as relations between the two countries have soured following Beirut's decision to disarm Hezbollah resistance group under pressure from Israel and the United States. Araghchi had earlier invited his Lebanese counterpart Youssef Raggi to visit Iran. But the Lebanese top diplomat called for a meeting in a third country – an issue that has been rejected by the Iranian foreign minister. In December, Araghchi said that he was "bemused" by his Lebanese counterpart's decision not to accept Tehran's invitation for an official vis-

it. The top diplomat noted that while he was grateful for Youssef Raggi's "kind invitation," there was no need for "a neutral venue" for talks between countries with "brotherly and full diplomatic relations."

Rejecting foreign interference

Referring to recent remarks by the US president about ongoing protests in Iran, he said the nation's internal affairs are exclusively a matter of the Iranian people. Araghchi stressed that Iran will not tolerate any foreign interference in its domestic affairs. "Internal matters in Iran concern no one but the Iranian people. Any foreign attempts to interfere are unacceptable. The government is working with the people to resolve any issues, and no outside power has the right to dictate our internal affairs," he emphasized. Turning to international diplomacy, Araghchi denounced Washington's obstructive approach, which he said makes meaningful negotiations impossible at present. "Now is not the right time for negotiations, and this is due to US policies. We have never abandoned the negotiating table. We are always ready for talks based on mutual interests



and respect, but the US government continues to pursue a confrontational and self-serving approach," he explained. Focusing on economic resilience, the minister outlined efforts to reduce reliance on hostile powers, adding, "Our Economic Diplomacy Department is now the most active section of the Foreign Ministry. We are expanding trade and economic cooperation, particularly with our neighbors, to bypass the obstacles imposed by the US." According to Araghchi, the provincial diplomacy program identifies local capacities and aligns them with regional opportunities to strengthen Iran's economy independently. This approach has been warmly received across the country. He concluded by reaffirming Iran's commitment to national strength and removal of sanctions on its own terms. "We have not forsaken our duty to remove sanctions, and we will act decisively and diligently when the opportunity arises, independent of US dictates," Araghchi said.

Iran calls Israeli FM's visit to Somaliland a 'dangerous precedent'

Iran's Foreign Ministry condemned the visit of Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar to the self-declared republic of Somaliland, calling it a "dangerous precedent in international relations" and a "lethal blow to the legal and normative foundations of the United Nations."

Speaking to reporters in Tehran Wednesday, ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei said the visit is "a clear violation of the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of Somalia" and strongly condemned it, Press TV reported.

The spokesman referred to the international community's emphasis on the need to respect the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of Somalia as an independent member state of the United Nations.

Baghaei added that "actions by the Zionist regime aimed at the dismemberment of Somalia constitute a dangerous precedent in international relations and a lethal blow to the legal and normative foundations of the United Nations."

He stressed the need for "cooperation among the international community, Islamic and African countries to prevent the weakening of Somalia's national sovereignty."

Saar arrived in Somaliland on Tuesday, meeting with the territory's self-declared president, Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi, known as Irro. The visit came just ten days after Israel became the first entity in the world to recognize Somaliland as independent.

Somalia's federal government condemned the visit as an "unauthorized incursion," saying Israel's recognition of Somaliland



Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar (L) visits Somaliland's self-declared president Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi, in Hargeisa, on January 6, 2026.

undermines the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Analysts say Israel's move appears aimed at securing a strategic foothold in East Africa, targeting Red Sea shipping lanes, intelligence operations, and regional influence, all at the expense of international norms.

The visit exposes the cynical opportunism of both parties. Israel, long willing to exploit fragile states for strategic advantage, is treating Somaliland as a pawn to project power in the Red Sea corridor and beyond. Somaliland's leaders, meanwhile, are legitimizing a breach of Somali sovereignty for short-term political gain, demonstrating a reckless disregard for the rule of law and regional stability.

For a region already beset by conflict, famine, and political fragility, such provocations are a dangerous escalation.

Rejecting the Russian ...

Many countries also argue that Russia's proposed conditions would lead to an unstable ceasefire and future conflicts rather than genuine peace. Without addressing the underlying causes of tension—such as Russian forces near new borders, deep-seated distrust, and the possibility of repeated aggression—such an agreement would merely postpone confrontation rather than resolve it. Russia's demands for complete sanctions relief and the restriction of Western military influence, without reciprocal guarantees, are seen in the West as unilateral concessions. Consequently, many perceive this model of peace as essentially consolidating Russia's military victories rather than achieving a fair and lasting agreement, making it politically, strategically, and legally unacceptable. Three scenarios are plausible in the context of the Ukraine-Russia crisis:

Scenario 1: Conditional and Limited Peace (Partial Acceptance of Russian Demands)

In this scenario, international pressure and the war's attritional nature might push Ukraine and the West toward accepting some of Russia's conditions, such as a long-term ceasefire, Ukraine's relative neutrality, and tacit recognition of Russian control over certain areas. Drivers of this scenario include declining military capacities, Western economic fatigue, increased attacks on critical infrastructure, and shifting European political priorities. The outcome would be a fragile peace, with eastern Ukraine effectively under opposing control and the international environment remaining tense. This scenario is likely to result in a "suspension of war" rather than a full resolution, although it would reduce the intensity of hostilities.

Scenario 2: Continued Attritional War

and Escalation

Here, neither Russia nor Ukraine would retreat from their strategic positions, with Western military and financial support for Ukraine continuing. Drivers include political deadlock in negotiations, intensified missile attacks, introduction of advanced equipment, and geopolitical competition among major powers. The result would be a protracted, multi-phase war threatening not only Ukraine's territory but also European energy security, global economic stability, and Eastern European borders. Short-term ceasefires may occur, but overall hostilities would persist.

Scenario 3: Comprehensive Peace through Multilateral Agreement and Security Guarantees

In this scenario, developments such as a change in political leadership, heavy international pressure, or strategic agreements among global powers could pave the way for a full peace settlement. Key drivers include the economic need for

reconstruction, public pressure in the countries involved, shifts in Europe's security calculus, and direct negotiations among major powers. Ukraine would accept certain military limitations in exchange for international security guarantees, while Russia would concede on some maximum demands. The outcome would be the gradual restoration of stability, the beginning of Ukraine's reconstruction, and the formation of a new European security framework—a challenging but most promising scenario for a durable resolution.

Ultimately, the future of peace between Russia and Ukraine depends heavily on the balance of military power, international political and economic pressure, and domestic developments in both countries. If the war remains attritional, the parties may move toward a managed ceasefire or conditional peace—one that may not be fully comprehensive or permanent but could prevent further infrastructure destruction and human

suffering. In such a case, agreements would focus on halting hostilities, stabilizing contact lines, and imposing military constraints, without fully resolving border disputes or the status of contested areas. This pattern may resemble a "cold peace," where active warfare halts but the political and security roots of the crisis persist. True and lasting peace, however, is possible only if either of two conditions is met: a fundamental shift in the strategic calculations of the parties, or effective intervention and security guarantees from major international powers. The future of peace hinges on whether the parties conclude that the cost of continuing the war exceeds that of compromise. If such a shift occurs, the formation of a new European security framework, Ukraine's reconstruction, and a partial rollback of maximum demands are plausible. If it does not, the prospect of peace remains distant, and the crisis may endure for years as a frozen or "cold" conflict.

Pezeshkian urges review of gov't economic reforms, vows crackdown on corruption

Economy Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Wednesday urged officials to identify and fix the possible shortcomings in the government's recent economic decisions to prevent pressure on people's livelihoods, stressing that a sustained crackdown on corruption and foreign exchange rent-seeking must remain a core priority.

Speaking at a cabinet meeting, Pezeshkian said that "serious and comprehensive confrontation with corruption and currency rent-seeking must be placed on the agenda as a fundamental and ongoing measure," his website quoted him as saying. During the session, a special task force presented a comprehensive report reviewing the government's recent decision on how subsidies for basic goods are paid to the final link in the consumption chain.



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (C) speaks at a cabinet meeting in Tehran on January 7, 2026.
● president.ir

Under a new foreign exchange policy for essential goods, framed within the next fiscal year's budget law, foreign currency for inputs and basic commodities will be supplied on a priority basis through a secondary market platform, known as the Second Hall, and a dedicated portal operated

by the Central Bank. Iran's fiscal year begins on March 21. The policy's main thrust is a shift from allocating foreign currency at the beginning of the supply chain to transferring subsidies to the end of the chain and the final consumer. The government said the redesign aims to eliminate

rent-seeking created by multiple exchange rates, reduce uncertainty for economic actors, and establish lasting market stability. Separately, Vice President for Executive Affairs Mohammad-Jafar Qaempanah told reporters on the sidelines of the cabinet meeting that the government's "economic

surgery, as he called it, will eliminate the flow of rent and corruption," IRNA reported.

"We are now undergoing a major economic surgery that is taking shape. Until now, foreign currency at 280,000 rials was allocated for importing basic goods so they would reach people at that rate. A large part of this process involved groups that, as importers, benefited from the gap between the official and free-market exchange rates," he said.

"When this major economic surgery is carried out, it is natural that some expect to continue earning the same profits as before. But with the reforms that have taken place, past corruption will certainly be eliminated,"

Qaempanah added.

With the continuation of this plan, he said, "conditions are expected to improve significantly by next week and issues related to supplying basic goods to be brought under control."

Also speaking to reporters at the end of the cabinet meeting, Hamid Pourmohammadi, head of the Plan and Budget Organization, said removing rents created by preferential exchange rates (officially subsidized rates) would allow domestic production to become active and meet the country's needs.

He added that some imported goods, such as rice, were previously brought in at a preferential exchange rate (government-subsidized) of 285,000 rials, while domestic production cost around 1,000,000 rials, a situation that effectively destroyed domestic production, created rent, and amounted to subsidizing foreign producers.

China expected to replace Venezuelan oil with Iranian crude, traders say

International Desk

Chinese independent refiners are expected to switch to heavy crude from sources including Iran in coming months to replace Venezuelan shipments halted since the US removed the country's president, traders and analysts said. Caracas and Washington agreed to export up to \$2 billion worth of Venezuelan crude to the United States, President Donald Trump said on Tuesday, after US forces captured Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro over the weekend, Reuters reported. That arrangement is likely to curtail Venezuelan supply to China, analysts say, reducing a source of cheap oil for independent refiners known as teapots. The world's biggest crude importer is a major buyer of discounted sanctioned oil from Russia, Iran and Venezuela.

Sparta Commodities analyst June Goh said on Wednesday that, "The Venezuela drama hits China's independent refineries the hardest, as they may lose access to the discounted heavy barrels." "However, as there are ample Russian and Iranian feedstocks available and Venezuelan barrels on water, we do not foresee the teapots needing to bid up for unsanctioned barrels as the economics would likely not make sense for them," she said. China imported 389,000 barrels per day of Venezuelan oil in 2025, about 4% of its total seaborne crude imports, Kpler data showed.

At least a dozen sanctioned vessels that loaded in December departed Venezuelan waters in early January carrying some 12 million barrels of crude and fuel, Reuters has reported. However, loadings for Asia at Venezuela's main ports have stopped since January 1, shipping data showed. Venezuelan crude aboard ships in Asia remains sufficient to cover roughly 75 days of Chinese demand, limiting any immediate



upside for alternatives, said Kpler senior analyst Xu Muyu. Teapots using Venezuelan oil are likely to switch to Russian and Iranian supply in March and April, and China can also tap non-sanctioned sources such as Canada, Brazil, Iraq, and Colombia, Muyu said. Buyers have yet to start sourcing alternatives, trade sources said, with Iranian Heavy crude priced at a discount of about \$10 per barrel to ICE Brent in ample supply, the cheapest alternative. According to media reports, Iran delivers oil to China through methods such as ship-to-ship transfers in waters near Malaysia and blending its crude with supplies from other countries to hide its origin. China's crude oil imports from Iran soared to their highest level in four months in November, Reuters reported in December, citing data from analytics firm Kpler. Kpler figures showed inflows

A view inside Shandong Haike Group is seen in Dongying, Shandong Province, China January 11, 2017.
● AIZHU.CHEN/REUTERS

of Iranian shipments increased by 233,000 barrels per day (bpd) from October to reach 1.35 million bpd in November, the highest since August. An analyst at energy consultancy Vortexa said at the time that the jump in volumes reflected lower prices for sanctioned Iranian and Russian crude, which boosted margins for the so-called "teapot" refineries and in turn fueled their demand for these barrels. Iran is reportedly offering China, the world's biggest crude importer, generous discounts, a claim Iranian officials confirm but reject the idea that they are excessive. Imports of Iranian crude are never registered in China's customs data due to US sanctions on the Middle Eastern producer.



Solar plants hit 1,374 MW instantaneous output record

Energy Desk

Iran's solar power plants achieved a new instantaneous production record of 1,374 megawatts in the 43rd week of the current year, which began on March 21, the Renewable Energy and Distributed Generation Monitoring Center reported. The monitoring center recorded the highest instantaneous electricity output at 12:10 pm Iran time on Monday, according to the Ministry of Energy, cited by IRNA. Data from the monitoring system showed that the output surpassed 1,374 megawatts, accounting for about three percent of the country's electricity generation mix. At the time of the report, the installed and observable capacity of Iran's solar power plants had exceeded 2,500 megawatts. On Tuesday, Iran's Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (SATBA), announced that the country's

renewable energy capacity had surpassed 3,500 megawatts.

The achievement came amid improved solar irradiance index following rainfall, reduced air pollution, and increased efficiency of solar panels, which played a significant role in boosting renewable electricity production. The record demonstrates the enhanced operational performance of solar plants and the effectiveness of monitoring and production management systems across the national grid, IRNA wrote.

Increasing the share of solar power during peak sunlight hours not only reduces pressure on thermal power plants but also helps balance electricity supply and demand and decrease fossil fuel consumption. Officials noted that the trend could further lower environmental pollutants and contribute to sustainable energy development goals in the country.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



US capture of Maduro, Venezuela attacks have no justification in int'l law



By Marc Weller

Chair of International Law at the University of Cambridge

OPINION

The capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife by US forces operating in Venezuela, and his forced transfer to the US for trial, poses a significant challenge for international law.

The US has described the operation as a judicial “extraction mission” undertaken by law enforcement operatives supported by the military. Yet this was a military operation of considerable scale, involving strikes on military targets in and around Caracas, the capital, and the forcible abduction of a sitting president by US special forces. It is clearly a significant violation of Venezuelan sovereignty and the UN Charter.

This fact is compounded by President Donald Trump’s announcement during his press conference of January 3 that the US will “run” Venezuela and administer a political transition, or regime change, under the threat of further, more massive uses of force. In addition, there seems to be a determination to use the threat of force to extract funds and resources in compensation for supposed “stolen” or nationalized US assets and oil.

Justifications are hard to see

It is difficult to conceive of possible legal justifications for transporting Maduro to the US or for the attacks. There is no UN Security Council mandate that might authorize force. Clearly, this was not an instance of a US act of self-defence triggered by a prior or ongoing armed attack by Venezuela.

The White House asserts that it is defending the American people from the devastating consequences of the illegal importation of drugs by “narco-terrorists” — consequences that could be compared to an armed attack against the US. However, in international law, only a kinetic assault with military or similar means qualifies as a trigger for self-defence.

‘Restoring democracy’

This leaves the argument of pro-democratic intervention. Notably, the US did not use pro-democratic action as a formal legal justification when it invaded Grenada in 1983 and displaced its communist-leaning government. Neither did it do so when it invaded Panama in 1989 and captured President Manuel A. Noriega, with a view to putting him on trial for drug offenses.

Washington avoided doing so because it feared creating a precedent that would

justify pro-democratic interventions by other countries that it might oppose. Instead, it relied on an unconvincing claim to self-defence.

In the case of Venezuela, the US alleges that Maduro stole the presidential poll of 2024, that opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzales Urrutia was the true victor, and that Venezuelan authorities falsified the result of 2025’s parliamentary elections. While this is disputed, there is little doubt that the electoral process was deeply flawed.

In 1948, the UN Declaration on Human Rights first enunciated the doctrine that the authority of a government must be based on the will of its people.

But in classical international practice, those who exercise effective control over a country’s population and territory will be treated as the government. Considerations of legal or political legitimacy matter less. Accordingly, most governments have abandoned the practice of formally recognizing newly established governments, however they come to power. If they are effective, they are the government.

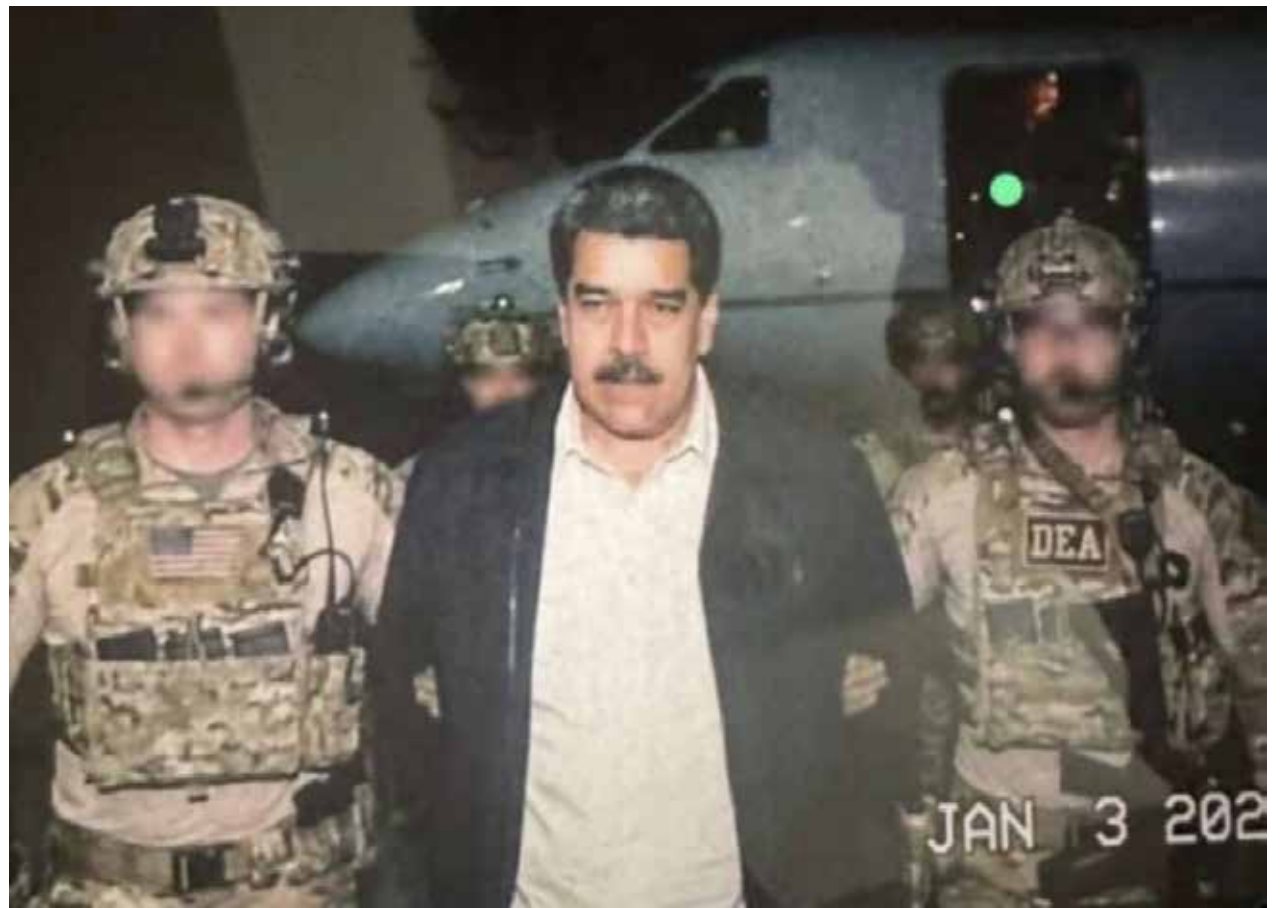
However, in the 1990s, with the end of the Cold War, the doctrine articulated by the UN Declaration on Human Rights gained in currency.

In 1990, Jean-Bertrand Aristide was elected President of Haiti. But he was soon displaced in a coup mounted by a military junta. In 1994, after many failed diplomatic attempts to restore the democratic outcome of the elections, the UN Security Council formally authorized a US-led force to facilitate the departure of the generals. Faced with the imminent US invasion, they gave in, and power was restored to Aristide.

Since then, a whole clutch of coups in Africa were opposed by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and its successor, the African Union (AU), or sub-regional organizations. In several instances, these organizations authorized the use of force to restore democracy. Most recently, force was used to overturn the attempted coup in Benin last December with the backing of regional organizations.

African institutions and governments have also used sanctions and threats of force where an incumbent government refused to hand over power after having lost elections. However, these instances generally required a formal election result.

This doctrine cannot be invoked in cases of creeping authoritarianism or in response to claims that elections have not been free and fair. It only applies in cases of counter-constitutional coups or where there is an election result that remains unimplemented by a sitting government.



Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro (C) is seen being flanked by heavily-armed US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) agents after being captured during an illegal operation on January 3, 2026.

● X



The apparent wish of the US government to work through the former vice president of the Maduro government Delcy Rodríguez and her cabinet and officials, rather than putting in place those who are believed to have won the elections of 2024/5, undermines any argument of pro-democratic intervention. The fact that the US now claims to run Venezuela and to put in place its future government under the shadow of the gun, along with the demand to dominate the oil sector and extract “compensation,” will reawaken uncomfortable memories of previous US dominance in the region.



In this courtroom sketch, Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro (1) and his wife, Cilia Flores (2nd-R), appear in Manhattan federal court in New York with their defense attorneys on January 5, 2026.

● ELIZABETH WILLIAMS/AP

fore him, the US authorities are unlikely to be deterred by this fact.

Overall, this episode further erodes international confidence in the principle, agreed after the horrors of the 20th century’s world wars, that states must not enforce their legal claims or political demands through the use of force.

The fact that the US now claims to run Venezuela and to put in place its future government under the shadow of the gun, along with the demand to dominate the oil sector and extract “compensation,” will reawaken uncomfortable memories of previous US dominance in the region.

To stop illegal conduct from turning into a precedent undermining the rule of law, it is necessary for other states and international bodies to identify the action as an infraction of the law and condemn it. The UN secretary-general promptly noted that the rules of international law have not been met in this instance, calling it a “dangerous precedent”.

At an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council held within days of the intervention, several Council members identified the operation as a violation of the UN Charter and international law. This included the Non-Aligned Movement, composed of 125 states. Russia was given the unedifying opportunity to present itself as a defender of the international prohibition of the use of force, despite its attack on Ukraine.

Another group of states, including the UK, was unwilling to identify the US as the author of an unlawful act. Instead, they referred to the democratic deficit of the Maduro government, its alleged involvement in drug trafficking, and human rights violations — without actually justifying the intervention. This was balanced with meek and formulaic general affirmations of the value of the international rule of law.

It was left to South Africa and other non-Western representatives to offer the most detailed and persuasive analyses in defence of the international legal order. Even if cautious Western diplomats at the UN may not yet be mandated to criticize the US’s intervention, this may be the moment when Western Europe also realizes that the US has decisively abandoned the core values that united them for the past century.

The full article first appeared on Chatham House.



Regime change in Venezuela

American justice as ‘supreme int’l crime’



By Dan Steinbock
Internationally-renowned expert on the multipolar world economy

OPINION

In a military operation, Venezuela’s President Maduro was captured and transported to New York to face charges in a federal court. Reportedly, the US Army’s elite Delta Force carried out a large-scale military strike and raid on Caracas, the capital of Venezuela, in the early hours of January 3, 2026.

It was no minor event. The US military’s operation was months in the making and involved more than 150 aircraft and drones, integrated space and cyber effects, multiple intelligence agencies, and law enforcement personnel, according to Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Dan Caine.

The operation involved multiple explosions and low-flying aircraft. The Venezuelan government described it as an “imperialist attack”. US forces located Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, in a heavily guarded residence within the Fort Tiuna military installation and captured them from their bedroom.

US President Donald Trump announced that Maduro and his wife were taken by helicopter to the USS Iwo Jima warship and transported to New York. Meanwhile, the US Department of Justice unsealed an indictment against Maduro and his wife on four serious charges, including conspiracy in narco-terrorism and cocaine importation, possession of machine-guns and destructive devices, and conspiracy to possess machine-guns and destructive devices against the US. The US has for years considered Maduro an illegitimate leader and had offered a \$50 million reward for information leading to his arrest. Maduro has consistently denied all allegations, calling the charges a US conspiracy to justify regime change.

A grave violation of rules-based int’l law

The US capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and the associated military operation were widely condemned by legal experts and several nations as a violation of international law, specifically the UN Charter, which prohibits the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of another state.

A unilateral military operation by one state to seize a sitting leader in another country is illegal. Critics of the US action, including the foreign ministries of China, France, Mexico, and Russia, have already cited violations of key UN Charter principles.

Article 2(4) requires member states to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any other state. Military force can generally only be used in self-defense (Article 51) or with authorization from the UN Security Council, neither of which occurred in this case. Nor was there any authorization by Congress, which the Trump administration simply ignored.

The capture is considered a grave violation of Venezuela’s sovereignty as it involved uninvited military action on Venezuelan soil.

Undermining weak signs of recovery

As a result of two decades of increasing economic coercion by the US government and the escalation of maximum pressure by the Trump administration, Venezuela’s economy is today highly fragile. There have been some promising signs, due to oil-driven growth and a slow-down in hyper-inflation, thanks to the eased sanctions, mainly by the Biden administration.



Smoke billows from the sites of explosion in Caracas, Venezuela, following a large-scale American military strike and raid in the early hours of January 3, 2026.

● JOSE ABREU/AFP



Through the 20th century, the US has been heavily involved in numerous interventions and coups to influence or overthrow foreign governments, particularly in Latin America and the Middle East, usually for political or economic reasons. These actions, such as the 1953 Iranian coup d’état or interventions in various Latin American countries under the Roosevelt Corollary, often resulted in the removal or exile of the sitting leader.



Protesters gather outside the White House on January 3, 2026, after news broke of the illegal ouster of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

● BILL CLARK/CQ ROLL CALL

nies possess, but their involvement has been limited by international sanctions. Venezuela has the world’s largest proven crude oil reserves with some 303 billion barrels, accounting for 17% of global reserves. Most of its proven oil reserves are extra-heavy crude oil from the Orinoco Belt.

Yet, despite the sizeable reserves, Venezuela produced barely 0.8% of total global crude oil in 2023.

“We’re going to have our very large United States oil companies, the biggest anywhere in the world, go in, spend billions of dollars, fix the badly broken infrastructure and start making money for the country,” Trump said in a public address. The simple reality is, as Trump acknowledged, that the US will look to tap Venezuelan oil reserves.

Future scenarios

President Trump said in a press conference that the US would “run” Venezuela on a temporary basis during the transition, and “get the oil flowing”. In reality, the power vacuum left by Maduro’s capture creates several potential paths forward for Venezuela.

● **Managed transition:** According to Venezuela’s constitution, Vice President Delcy Rodríguez, a key member of Maduro’s United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), would assume power and call for new elections within 30 days. In the process, the Trump administration is likely to want the opposition candidate, such as Edmundo González, recognized as the legitimate winner of the contested 2024 election to take office. However, the key role in this scenario is predicated on the reactions of the socialist government and the military.

● **Consolidation of pro-Maduro**

power: The pro-Maduro elite and military leaders, many of whom are under US sanctions, thus facing potential prosecution, will seek to maintain control. In this scenario, a high-ranking military official or a civilian head from within the ruling socialist party could replace Maduro and ensure the continuation of the current government and its control over the state and oil industry. It could result in new US attacks and repression in Venezuela.

● **Internal conflict:** The power vacuum could also lead to infighting among military factions or between different elite groups. The outcome could be widespread instability, popular unrest, and potentially an internal armed conflict involving pro-government armed groups and opposition forces, or even a full military takeover. These scenarios could instigate new US attacks.

In this early stage, the Trump administration’s goal has been to insulate Maduro from Venezuela and a murky judicial process that will destabilize Venezuela. The latter will then serve as a pretext for covert efforts to implant a pro-US leadership or to drive the country to a civil war.

Although the US government has asserted that its actions are justified under domestic law and presidential authority, the overwhelming international legal opinion is that the use of military force to seize a leader on foreign territory constitutes an illegal “kidnapping” and a clear violation of international law and the UN Charter.

Int’l law vs imperial plunder

Through the 20th century, the US has been heavily involved in numerous interventions and coups to influence or overthrow foreign governments, particularly in Latin America and the Middle East, usually for political or economic reasons. These actions, such as the 1953 Iranian coup d’état or interventions in various Latin American countries under the Roosevelt Corollary, often resulted in the removal or exile of the sitting leader.

The dark history of external interventions, often involving subsequent terror and repression, insurgency and counter-insurgency, and decades of instability, has featured repeated efforts at regime change or capturing specific individuals. These include the arrest of Manuel Noriega (Panama, 1989), targeted strikes and regime change attempts (Iraq, Libya, and Yemen, 2000s and 2010s), the recent bombing of Iran, Nigeria, and the logistical and financial support of Israel’s bombing of and genocidal atrocities in Gaza.

By contrast, international law is built on principles of sovereignty and non-interference, which make direct, peacetime attacks on foreign sovereigns highly controversial breaches of international peace. Until his death at the age of 103, Benjamin Ferencz, the last Nuremberg prosecutor, consistently argued that unauthorized US military actions, like the 2020 killing of the Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani and the Iraq War, violated international law.

Ferencz believed that wars of aggression, as defined by the Nuremberg Principles, are the “supreme international crime,” and leaders who initiate them should face international prosecution. In this view, the standards set at Nuremberg apply to all nations, including the US, and failure to apply them means that “law has lost its meaning”.

That’s the crossroads where we stand today. A world where international law is devoid of meaning and a pretext for imperial plunder — and a world where international law ensures the continuance of human civilization.

The article first appeared on Informed Comment.



Gholamreza Takhti: A people's champion for the ages

Sports Desk

Gholamreza Takhti may stand as one of the most decorated figures in the history of Iranian sports, yet the source of his legendary status among his compatriots—still enduring decades after his death—lies far beyond his achievements on the wrestling mat.

As Iranians marked the 58th anniversary of his premature and mysterious passing at the age of 37 on Wednesday, the following offers a brief look into the life and career of the former world and Olympic champion.

A glittering sporting legacy

Takhti first rose to prominence at the 1951 World Championships in Helsinki, Finland, where, despite his lack of international experience, he won an impressive silver medal in the 79kg freestyle class at just 21 years of age – offering an early glimpse of his extraordinary talent.

He returned to the Finnish capital the following year for the 1952 Olympic Games, again settling for silver, this time behind Soviet wrestler David Tsimakuridze.

At the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, Takhti dominated all his opponents in the 87kg class to



become the first Iranian – alongside the late wrestler Emam-Ali Habibi – to win an Olympic gold medal.

His success continued with gold at the 1958 Asian Games in Tokyo, before he claimed the first of his two world titles in his hometown of Tehran a year later.

Takhti added a second Olympic silver in Rome in 1960, finishing

behind Turkish wrestler İsmet Atlı, and then captured the 87kg gold at the 1961 World Championships, inspiring Iran to its first-ever team world title in Yokohama.

His participation at the 1962 World Championships in Toledo, USA, was a testament to his fortitude. Wrestling through a severe illness, he was controversially denied gold due to a mere

200-gram weight difference against his final opponent—Soviet great Aleksandr Medved—and had to settle for silver. Immediately after the final, he was rushed to hospital for emergency surgery.

Between 1962 and 1966, Takhti remained a mainstay of the national team despite his advancing age. At the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, he was unlucky to

miss out on the podium, finishing fourth. In 1966, at 36 and well past his prime, he accepted the call-up for the World Championships in Toledo. After an opening win, he was defeated by the legendary Medved and eventual silver medalist Ahmet Ayık, drawing the curtain on a glorious career.

The people's champion

What truly distinguished Takhti was not merely his medals, but his humanity, humility, and profound connection to the people. Despite worldwide fame and sporting glory, he always lived among the people and for the people. He never remained indifferent to social suffering and, whenever needed, extended a helping hand to those in distress.

A shining example was his response to the devastating 1962 Buin Zahra earthquake. At the height of his fame, he traveled to the disaster zone and launched a nationwide public aid campaign in the streets of Tehran. The public's overwhelming response to his call was a testament to his unique stature. One particularly poignant moment saw an impoverished woman donate her only tent – a powerful symbol of the collective empathy that Takhti embodied.

Even after his retirement, Takhti remained a moral exemplar

in Iranian society. He never allowed fame to separate him from ordinary people, often using his own resources to help the poor. These qualities immortalized him not just as a wrestling champion, but as a national symbol of sacrifice, honesty, and humility.

Mysterious death

Takhti's death in a hotel room in the Iranian capital on January 7, 1968, remains one of the greatest enigmas in Iranian sports history. Official reports at the time cited suicide due to personal and family issues, but persistent theories suggest that SAVAK – the intelligence service of the Pahlavi regime – was behind his death, as he was known to hold anti-establishment views.

To this day, the question remains unanswered: Was it suicide, or was it political murder? The truth has become part of Iran's enduring historical mysteries. What remains beyond doubt, however, is that Takhti's legacy lives on – not only as a wrestling champion, but as a complete human being and a moral ideal. Beyond his medals, he occupies a far greater place in the hearts of the Iranian people. His humanitarian deeds will never be forgotten, and his name will forever shine in the history of this land.

Milano Cortina 2026:

Iran confirms lineup for Winter Games

Sports Desk

Iran will be represented by four athletes in the men's and women's competition at the upcoming Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Games in Italy, the country's Skiing and Winter Sports Federation announced.

The 25th edition of the multi-sport event will take place from February 6 to 22 at sites across Lombardy and North-east Italy.

Sadaf Saveh-Shemeshki will compete in the women's alpine skiing event, with Mohammad Kiadarbandsari taking part in the men's competition.

In cross-country skiing, Samaneh Beyrami Baher and Danial have secured their places in the women's and men's contests, respectively.

The Iranian coaching staff com-

prises Baqer Kalhor (men's alpine), Mitra Kalhor (women's alpine), Seyyed Mostafa Mirhashemi (men's cross-country), and Azadeh Kiashemeshki (women's cross-country).

The Iranian chief de mission at the Olympics will be Bahram Saveh-Shemeshki, the chairman of the sport's national governing body.

Preparations for the Games are back on schedule, with snow making and infrastructure work progressing well across all venues, International Ski and Snowboard Federation (FIS) president Johan Eliasch said on Wednesday.

Speaking one month before the start of the event, Eliasch said recent cold temperatures had helped organizers address earlier concerns over snow farming and snow making at key

sites including Cortina d'Ampezzo, Livigno, Bormio and Val di Fiemme.

"Yes, it has," Eliasch said when asked whether his confidence had grown. "The preparations are advancing very well. We've had cold temperatures, which helps. And right now, it looks like there should be no issue to complete everything on time as planned. So that's very good news."

Italian authorities and organizers have faced mounting scrutiny over delays, funding gaps and climate-related risks ahead of the Games, particularly after a warm start to the winter raised doubts about snow reliability.

Eliasch said snow security remained partly dependent on weather conditions but stressed that organizers had the technical



Iran's Samaneh Beyrami Baher will compete in the women's cross-country competition at the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Games. hamshahronline.ir

capacity and resources in place to manage risks.

"We are in the hands of the gods

but you also need the resources for snow making, and the capabilities that are necessary here

are in place," Eliasch said. "So from that perspective ... it's all looking good."

Esteghlal in advanced talks to sign ex-Lakers star Cook: Report



● REX ARBOGAST/AP

Sports Desk

Iranian top-flight basketball club Esteghlal is closing in on a deal to sign former NBA point guard Quinn Cook, according to Iranian sports news website Varzesh3.

Should the deal go through, the 32-year-old American will be part of the Tehran Blues for the Iranian Basketball Super League playoffs. Esteghlal leads the 11-team table of the regular season with 11 wins from 14 games – level on 25 points with defending champion Shahrdari Gorgan and third-placed Kaleh Amol.

Cook, who has been playing for Fujian Sturgeons in the Chinese

Basketball Association since last March, is a former player of several NBA franchises, including Dallas Mavericks, New Orleans Pelicans, Los Angeles Lakers, and Cleveland Cavaliers, winning the NBA title twice.

He was part of the Warriors' team that defeated the Cavaliers 4-0 in the 2018 NBA Finals, before repeating the success two years later with the Lakers – alongside LeBron James and Anthony Davis – thanks to a 4-2 victory over the Miami Heat.

"Cook is not just a deadly three-point marksman or a mere playmaker; he has a standout personality trait that is worth its weight

in gold for Esteghlal – a team full of young players waiting for a spark to push them beyond their limits. In basketball circles, Cook is known as someone who transforms the locker-room atmosphere and is famously dubbed a 'motivation bomb,'" Varzesh3 wrote of the American.

"He has previously shared the court with superstars such as LeBron James and Stephen Curry, and thanks to his distinctive character, he was considered a favorite teammate of theirs. Now, the presence of such a figure in Esteghlal's locker room could be truly inspiring for young players hungry for a spark and a role model, lifting the team's fighting spirit to its peak."

Rasht translates culture into cuisine

Iranica Desk

Rasht, the capital city of Gilan Province, is not a city that can be understood merely by sight or sound; it must be tasted. A city that tells its story not only through historic buildings and local rituals, but through flavors, aromas, and the lived relationships of the table, Rasht today stands at a point where it can move beyond the title of “Creative City of Gastronomy” and emerge as an active player in Iran’s cultural diplomacy. Backed by a rich legacy of intangible culinary heritage, Rasht now has the capacity to offer the world a human, peace-oriented, and civilizational narrative of Iran — spoken through taste. In contemporary cultural heritage studies, food is recognized as a form of “living intangible heritage”, a carrier of indigenous knowledge, ethical relationships with nature, social bonds, and collective historical memory. Gilani cuisine, with its remarkable diversity of ingredients, cooking methods, and deep connection to climate and ecology, stands as a striking example of this modern understanding, according to chtn.ir. In Rasht, food is woven into everyday life. It is knowledge drawn from rice paddies, gardens, forests, and markets, passed down from generation to generation. This continuity between nature, people, and culture is precisely what gives Gilani cuisine its heritage value and distinguishes it from mere consumerism.

If Rasht is read as a cultural text, its historic bazaar forms one of its most important chapters. The Rasht Bazaar is a living network of social interaction, transmission of local knowledge, and reproduction of cultural identity. Here, food moves beyond abstraction; through direct contact with people, sound, color, and scent, it acquires meaning. The bazaar functions as a medium that conveys its narrative without advertising — a medium that shows domestic and international visitors how food culture in Rasht is deeply intertwined with everyday life, and how it has adapted to modern times while remaining rooted in tradition. Rasht’s designation as a Creative City of Gastronomy within UNESCO’s Creative Cities Network is, by nature, both a cultural and a policy responsibility. UNESCO expects creative cities to use food as a tool for sustainable development, cultural dialogue, and social cohesion. With this title, Rasht has entered an international arena where cities are evaluated not by economic or military power, but by their cultural narratives. This is where cultural policy-making, urban management, and the Ministry of Cultural Heritage become crucial; without strategic planning, the title risks being reduced to a consumable brand. In today’s world, food, music, art, and lifestyle have become key instruments of public diplomacy. Food, in particular, is



● zandproduct.com

a universal language — one that breaks down prejudices and opens space for dialogue. Within this framework, Rasht can serve as one of Iran’s most important hubs of culinary diplomacy. The experience of tasting Gilani food creates an immediate, unmediated encounter with Iranian culture — often more effective than dozens of official statements. At a time when Iran faces serious challenges in international image-making, this capacity carries added significance. One of Iran’s main global challenges is Iranophobia and one-dimensional portrayals of

Iranian society. In this context, culinary diplomacy can play a reparative role. Food carries messages of peace, hospitality, and humane coexistence — concepts deeply rooted in Iranian culture. Through its culinary narrative, Rasht can present an image of Iran centered on life, nature, ethical consumption, and coexistence. Operating at a human level, this image is inherently more effective. One often-overlooked dimension of Gilani food culture is the role of women. Gilani women play a central role not only in cooking, but in preserving rec-

ipes, transmitting indigenous knowledge, and managing the micro-economy of food. This has turned cuisine into a sphere of cultural and social empowerment. In many homes and local businesses in Rasht, women are the primary custodians of culinary heritage — a heritage that has survived not through formal registration, but through continuous practice. At a time when the world is grappling with environmental crises and excessive consumption, revisiting Gilani cuisine offers important lessons. The use of seasonal ingredients, respect

for nature, avoidance of waste, and dietary diversity reflect a form of indigenous ecological wisdom that is more necessary today than ever. These characteristics make Gilani food a model for responsible tourism and sustainable development — aligned with broader cultural heritage policies aimed at resource conservation and strengthening local economies. For Rasht to truly fulfill its role in cultural diplomacy, an event-based and ceremonial approach to food must give way to a strategic one. Festivals, events, and tourism programs will only be effective if they are defined within a comprehensive policy framework. Drafting a “National Culinary Diplomacy Document for Iran,” centered on cities like Rasht, could be a significant step forward — one that recognizes food as part of Iran’s civilizational narrative and integrates it into cultural policy, tourism planning, and even international relations. Today, Rasht is more than a tourist destination; it is a cultural possibility. A possibility for narrating Iran through a human, tangible, and peace-oriented path. If properly understood and managed, Rasht can become a model for other Iranian cities — demonstrating how a global future can be shaped from the heart of tradition. In a world where dialogue has become increasingly difficult, perhaps flavors can still build bridges. Rasht is one of the strongest of those bridges.

Artisan devotes life to preserving traditional Kar-Bafi in Ardakan



● chtn.ir

Iranica Desk

An artisan of Kar-Bafi (traditional hand weaving) and manager of a handicrafts workshop in Ardakan, Yazd Province, said her main professional activity is focused on preserving Ardakan’s traditional Kar-Bafi — a centuries-old form of hand weaving that uses cotton yarns on wooden looms to produce everyday textiles. Fatemeh Shaker Ardakani, a prominent example of the continuity and revival of Ardakan’s Kar-Bafi, explained that this craft has been practiced in her family for three consecutive generations. “For me, Kar-Bafi is not just a job; it is part of my identity, my life, and my daily routine,” she said. Shaker Ardakani grew up alongside the weaving loom and learned the

craft from her mother, who is now 86 years old. Today, her daughter serves as the workshop’s training supervisor and production manager, continuing the family tradition. Their long-held belief, she noted, is that Kar-Bafi represents a way of life rather than merely a source of income. Emphasizing the importance of hands-on experience, she said that while formal training plays an important role, real learning takes place through living and working beside the loom. According to her, the workshop’s ongoing training courses provide teenagers and young adults with valuable opportunities to experience the creative process firsthand. “This art is shaped through patience, mistakes, and repetition,” she added, stressing that theoretical instruction

alone cannot replace practical experience and long-term engagement with the craft. The workshop’s products preserve the authenticity of traditional Kar-Bafi while offering variety in color, size, and design to meet contemporary tastes. These products include towels, hand cloths, cotton fabrics, traditional clothing, and practical everyday items. Many customers become regular buyers due to the high quality and authenticity of the products, and the workshop itself has become a destination for visitors interested in observing and learning about the weaving process. All materials used are high-quality natural yarns sourced from reputable domestic markets. Shaker Ardakani, who is also a handicrafts instructor, believes Kar-Bafi is a path to preserving cultural identity, achieving mental calm, and creating lasting cultural values. She advises young people interested in the craft to enter the field with patience and passion, emphasizing that success depends on continuous learning and hands-on practice at the loom. She also emphasized the need for sustained and practical support for artisans, including the provision of suitable workspaces, insurance coverage, and the creation of stable sales markets. She expressed her appreciation for the support of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicraft Department and local authorities in Ardakan. Her activities — combining heritage preservation, training the next generation, and producing authentic and functional products — have turned the workshop into one of the leading centers for the revival of traditional Kar-Bafi in Ardakan.

Restoration project revives Darvish Qanat in Shahrud



● mehrnews.com

Iranica Desk

The head of the Agricultural Jihad Department of Shahrud, Semnan Province, announced the completion of restoration and rehabilitation operations on the historic Darvish Qanat in Torud village. Speaking on the sidelines of a field visit to the project, Hamid Aqabiki said that restoring and rehabilitating such qanats plays a fundamental role in ensuring the sustainability of regional water resources, according to ISNA. Referring to the special status of qanats in Iran’s culture and history, he noted that these ancient structures are not only vital sources of water in arid and desert regions, but also an integral part of Iran’s national identity and indigenous knowledge. Aqabiki added that the project is part of the town’s comprehensive and structured plans to revive all traditional water resources, with the primary objective of providing sustainable water supplies to support local agricultural development. He explained that dredging, repair, and structural reinforcement works on the Darvish Qanat were carried out with a

high level of technical precision in order to optimize water flow and prevent the loss of valuable resources. He emphasized that the completion of the restoration project can directly increase the productivity of nearby farms and orchards, helping to create the conditions necessary for sustainable economic growth in the Torud village. He also pointed out that the special focus on water supply in Torud is part of Shahrud’s broader strategy to support farmers in addressing climate-related challenges. He stressed that preserving and rehabilitating qanats is a historical responsibility that must be passed on to future generations to ensure this valuable heritage remains alive. According to him, such projects can serve as successful models for other similar regions and can significantly contribute to reducing water scarcity challenges in the agricultural sector. Aqabiki expressed optimism about the long-term outcomes of the operation, stating that with the full rehabilitation of the Darvish Qanat, an increase in agricultural production and an improvement in the livelihoods of local farmers are expected.



Jalal Al-e Ahmad Literary Awards

Culture minister calls nation ‘land of stories’



Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's literary depth and geographic diversity offer vast inspiration for writers and documentarians, Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Abbas Salehi said at the closing ceremony of the 18th Jalal Al-e Ahmad Literary Awards on January 7 at the National Library and Archives of Iran (NLAI). Salehi emphasized that Iran is “a land of stories and subjects,” praising the late author Jalal Al-Ahmad for recognizing the country's narrative potential decades ago, IRNA reported. He noted that writers and documentarians encounter Iran's expansive



Iran's Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Abbas Salehi speaks during the closing ceremony of the 18th Jalal Al-e Ahmad Literary Awards at the national Library and Archives of Iran on January 7, 2026.

● IBNA

cultural and geographic capacity, a legacy reflected in Al-e Ahmad's works, including ‘The School Principal,’ and ‘Bread and Pen’.

The ceremony, held in the National Library's Qalam Hall, showcased Iran's enduring literary traditions, from pre-Islamic storytelling centers at the ancient Jundishapur hospital to the flourishing of narrative poetry and prose under classical figures. Salehi cited encyclopedist Ibn al-Nadim, whose book compiled Persian knowledge later translated and enriched by successive generations, illustrating centuries of cross-cultural literary exchange.

Iranian storytelling, he said, has persisted and evolved. From Rudaki's adaptation of ‘Kalila and Dimna’ into Persian verse to over 400 mystical stories in Rumi's ‘Masnavi’, narrative forms have remained central to Iranian culture.

“Storytelling runs through Iran's

history. Iran is, above all, a land of story,” Salehi affirmed.

He also pointed to the nation's natural and ethnic diversity as fertile ground for documentary work. “Apart from polar and equatorial climates, Iran encompasses every other climatic zone. Coupled with linguistic and ethnic variation, this creates unparalleled material for writers and documentarians alike,” he said.

The Jalal Al-e Ahmad Literary Awards, established to honor the late author and promote contemporary Iranian literature, celebrate works in fiction, nonfiction, and literary criticism that capture both historical depth and modern complexity.

By linking classical literary heritage with contemporary creative practice, the event reinforced Tehran's role as a hub for Iranian literary and documentary production.

National wrestling museum opens in Tehran

Iran inaugurated its National Wrestling Museum in Tehran on Wednesday, commemorating the sport's century-long contribution to national pride and coinciding with the anniversary of legendary wrestler Gholamreza Takhti's death.

The museum, named after martyr Gholamreza Kianpour, preserves medals, uniforms, and memorabilia of 127 Iranian wrestlers from global competitions and Olympic tournaments. It aims to enshrine wrestling not only as a sport but as a vital element of Iran's cultural heritage, IRNA reported.

Speaking at the opening, Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Reza Salahi-Amiri highlighted the role of Alireza Dabir, Olympic and world champion turned federation president, as a model of ef-



Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Reza Salahi-Amiri inaugurates its National Wrestling Museum in Tehran on January 7, 2026.

● ANA

fective leadership capable of elevating Iran's sporting and cultural stature internationally.

He also emphasized Takhti's enduring legacy, noting that wrestling transcends medals and tournaments

to leave lasting imprints in the hearts of the people. “Only a few champions remain immortal in our collective memory, and Takhti is among them,” he said. The minister announced that all museum artifacts will soon be registered in Iran's comprehensive national property system, with plans to elevate the museum to national, and eventually international, status within a month.

A new publication, ‘Wrestling in the Shahnameh,’ was also unveiled, linking the sport to Persian literary heritage and reinforcing its cultural significance. Salahi-Amiri concluded by affirming government recognition of wrestling's social impact, describing it as a source of national pride and a legacy to be transmitted to students, youth, and future generations.

National Calligraphy Biennale held in Qazvin

Arts & Culture Desk

The eighth National Calligraphy Biennale held at the historic Ali Qapu complex in Iran's western city of Qazvin on January 6, 2026, drawing artists, scholars, and cultural enthusiasts from across the country.

The exhibition showcased the richness and diversity of Persian calligraphy, from classical styles to contemporary interpretations, highlighting the art form's central role in Iranian culture, literature, and identity, IRNA reported.

Organizers described the Biennale as a key platform for preserving centuries-old traditions while nurturing emerging talent.

The event featured works that illustrate the integration of calligraphy into literature, architecture, and daily life, underlining its historical and aesthetic significance.

Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Abbas Salehi, attended the closing ceremony, noting the art form's broader cultural and spiritual importance.

He described calligraphy as embodying discipline, patience, and moral



● Mehr

cultivation, with a historic role in governance where mastery of the script once determined eligibility for public office.

Salehi also emphasized its ties to the Qur'an, presenting the art as a vessel of religious and aesthetic expression.

Iran's painter Mohseny Nasab awarded at Italian event

Arts & Culture Desk

Tehran-based painter Shirin Mohseny Nasab claimed a special award at the international “Temple of Dreams” art exhibition in Italy, for her piece ‘Hands’. The accolade recognized her work as one of the most acclaimed visual art entries by the Palmieri Foundation.

The award, granted alongside two other works, included a formal certificate signed by the foundation's curator, publication in the winter 2025 issue of Art and Beyond Art magazine, and a four-month display on the Artsper platform with the option to replace sold works, IRNA reported. Mohseny Nasab's selection also secures her a place in the 2026 iteration of the “Dream Art” exhibition, reinforcing her international visibility. ‘Hands’ exemplifies a fusion of abstraction and figurative design, drawing attention to both the aesthetic and symbolic role of hands in artistic creation. Critics highlight the painting's nuanced interplay of earthy browns and orange tones, precise line work, and dynamic contrast between bold



backgrounds and intricate hand forms, describing it as a compelling visual dialogue between color and form.

In her own account, Mohseny Nasab explained that ‘Hands’ evolved spontaneously through free, expressive lines inspired by the form of her left hand. Developed without preliminary sketches in a style blending abstraction and action painting, the series reflects her view of hands as instruments of creation and conduits of life. She aims to invite audiences into a personal interpretive experience, emphasizing minimalism as a gateway to introspection rather than narrative.

Short film ‘Birthday’ selected for Poppy Jasper Festival in California

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian filmmaker Raheleh Karami's short film ‘Birthday,’ produced by Hojjat Babaei, will screen at the 20th Poppy Jasper International Film Festival (PJIFF) in Morgan Hill, California, from April 8 to 15, 2026.

The festival, a leading platform for independent cinema in California, showcases short and feature films from around the world while

championing diversity, social engagement, and the voices of emerging filmmakers, ILNA reported.

‘Birthday’ follows a young woman navigating the complexities of a pivotal birthday, capturing intimate familial dynamics and personal reflection.

The film features performances by Shaghayegh Faryad Shiran and Mahana Ekhlas, whose portrayals bring nuanced emotional depth to the narrative.