

Araghchi: US evacuation of Ain al-Asad fortifies Iraq's national sovereignty

Iraqi FM says Tehran-Baghdad security part of regional security

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said the withdrawal of US military forces from Iraq's Ain al-Asad base would strengthen Iraq's national sovereignty, describing the move as a clear sign of growing independence and stability in the Arab country.

Araghchi was speaking on Sunday during a joint press conference with his Iraqi counterpart, Fuad Hussein, following their meeting in Tehran, where the two sides discussed bilateral relations as well as regional and international developments.

"The withdrawal of US military forces from the Ain al-Asad base and the end of the UNAMI mission are clear indications of the consolidation of independence, stability, and national sovereignty in Iraq," Araghchi said, as reported by Press TV.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has always sought a strong and independent Iraq and believes that the country has the necessary capacities to play a key role in regional peace and stability." He noted that the meeting came after elections in Iraq and marked a new step toward planning the development of relations between the two countries.

Araghchi also said Iran and Iraq were seeking to reach a "strategic cooperation agreement," reiterating that Tehran supports a "stable Iraq with independent political sovereignty."

For his part, Hussein said security in Iraq and Iran was inseparable from the security of the wider region.

"We believe that the security of Iraq and Iran is part of the region's security. The security of the Iranian people is important to us, just as the security of the



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (R) speaks during a press conference with his Iraqi counterpart Fuad Hussein in Tehran, Iran, on January 18, 2026.

IRNA

region is important," he said. Hussein said regional officials he met ahead of his trip to Tehran had emphasized that regional security was interconnected.

Iran and Iraq agreed on the "indivisibility of regional security," the need for non-interference in internal affairs, and the continuation of consultations to address regional challenges, he added.

He also said that he was informed about the situation in Iran, in the wake of deadly foreign-backed riots across the country.

Some shopkeepers last month staged peaceful protests in dif-



ferent Iranian cities over economic grievances, which are directly linked to unilateral US sanctions.

The demonstrations, however,

were steered toward violence after public statements by US and Israeli regime figures encouraged vandalism and disorder.

During the unrest, foreign-backed armed rioters damaged public property and caused casualties among civilians and security forces.

'Blatant lie': FM spox slams European compassion for Iran's human rights



Esmail Baqaei

IRNA

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baqaei on Sunday described the European countries' "claim of compassion and concern" for Iranians' human rights as "a blatant lie" amid recent protests over economic problems.

Speaking during his weekly press conference, Baqaei said if the European countries are really concerned about human rights of the Iranian people, they should have lifted sanctions that have been imposed on every Iranian citizen and deprived patients of medicine.

The Iranian official said the Eu-

rope's approach toward international issues has led to diminishing of its credibility as an actor that could have played a constructive role in international developments.

By "blindly" following in the footsteps of the United States and the Israeli regime in international affairs, the Europe is stripping itself of an effective role in international matters, Baqaei said.

He also referred to recent positions taken by some European countries against the Islamic Republic over recent deadly riots in the country, saying that such stances are in no way "acceptable or justifiable."

Baqaei said the European countries have "deliberately" ignored realities in Iran, stressing that they are well aware of the events that took place from January 8th to 10th in Iran, during which peaceful protests over economic woes were hijacked by violent elements trained and equipped from outside the country.

IRGC forces arrest riot ringleaders in Iran's Khuzestan

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) forces arrested ringleaders and terrorist elements involved in recent foreign-linked riots in Iran's southwestern Khuzestan Province, confiscating various types of lethal weapons from them.

In a statement released on Sunday, the deputy public relations of the IRGC's provincial unit in Khuzestan, said those detained are charged with killing the innocent, damaging public and private property, disrupting public order, and terrorizing people, as well as destroying holy places, Press TV reported. The terrorists had been tasked by foreign agencies to commit acts of sabotage and arson, kill people, assassinate the elite individuals, and create ethnic division, the statement read.

The detainees also assigned to dismantle vital infrastructure such as water and electricity, gas,



telephone, oil pipelines, and attack military facilities and police stations.

The photo shows a bank which has been destroyed in recent riots in Tehran, Iran.

IRNA

regime figures encouraged vandalism and disorder. During the unrest, foreign-backed armed rioters damaged public property and caused casualties among civilians and security forces.

Istanbul rally denounces US-Israeli threats against Iran



International Desk

Hundreds of people gathered outside Iran's consulate in the Turkish city of Istanbul on Sunday to support Iran against threats posed by the United States and the Israeli regime.

The rally, called by "the International Solidarity Association" in Turkey, followed US threats of military attack on Iran over recent protests in the country. It came a day after thousands of Iraqi demonstra-

tors gathered in the capital Baghdad to show their support for Iran. Peaceful protests over economic concerns across Iran, which began on December 28, gradually turned violent after meddlesome statements by the US and Israeli officials.

During the unrest, foreign-backed mercenaries rampaged through cities, killing security forces and civilians and damaging

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



NIOC: 12% of Iran's crude processing allocated to private sector under partnership model



Economy Desk

A senior National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) official announced on Sunday that 12% of the country's crude oil processing capacity had been allocated to the private and non-governmental sector through rapid-deployment modular refinery projects — known as "skid-mounted" units — under a public-private partnership (PPP) model. Amir Moqiseh, the director of investment and business at NIOC, told SHANA that crude processing unit contracts used to be signed under traditional engineering, procurement, and construction (EPC) agreements, which typically spanned three years but often took more than five years to complete. He cited the Central Processing and Export Terminal (CPE) and

at the South Azadegan joint oil field and the central processing facility of Ahvaz as examples. Under the new PPP framework, skid-mounted processing facilities can be built in less than two years, Moqiseh said. These contracts have a 10-year duration, and state entities are required by law to assign eligible projects to private investors through public-private partnership arrangements, he added. "In the first phase, public-private partnership contracts for processing 115,000 barrels per day of crude oil from four oilfields were awarded to private investors," according to the official. "In the second phase, six additional contracts totaling \$1.671 billion were signed for processing 315,000 barrels per day from six other oilfields." In total, 430,000 barrels per day of crude processing capacity has been allocated through skid-mounted PPP contracts — 190,000 bpd dedicated to production enhancement and 240,000 bpd to production maintenance and oil quality upgrading, he said. "With the implementation of skid-mounted refinery projects under the PPP model, 12% of the country's crude oil processing is now carried out by the private and non-governmental sector," Moqiseh said.

Moqiseh also noted that NIOC has signed PPP-based guaranteed-service purchase agreements with six private companies for the supply of 20 land-based drilling rigs, each with 2,000 horsepower. Under the contracts, the companies are required to procure the new rigs from abroad within six months.

Iran eyes \$1b exports to Kuwait in case of trade barriers removal: Joint chamber



By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE



Iran's exports to Kuwait have reached \$400 million annually and could climb to \$1 billion within less than three years if trade barriers are removed, said Abazar Barari, secretary-general of the Iran-Kuwait Joint Chamber of Commerce.

Speaking to Iran Daily, Barari noted that Kuwait currently imports between \$350 billion and \$400 billion worth of goods annually from around the world and that Iran could significantly expand its share in the market.

"Given the high commercial capacities between Iran and Kuwait, if trade obstacles are lifted, Iran's exports to Kuwait could reach \$1 billion in under three years," Barari said.

He explained that Kuwait, as a small-population oil-rich nation, relies heavily on imports to meet domestic demand and has virtually no exportable surplus. "Kuwait has a high per capita income, and

its population relies on imported goods for daily needs." Barari highlighted longstanding trade ties between the two countries, which deepened after Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait and Iran's support for the emirate during the crisis. "Since then, bilateral trade has consistently grown," he said.

Trade balance

Over the three past decades, the trade balance has favored Iran. Exports from Kuwait to Iran have remained minimal — typically under \$10 million per year — and have largely consisted of used machinery and second-hand foreign vehicles. Despite current momentum, Barari cautioned that Iran's exports to Kuwait are unlikely to surpass the \$400 million mark by the end of the current Iranian year (began on March 21) due to ongoing trade restrictions linked to anti-Iran sanctions and logistical challenges.

Iran has been under Western sanctions for decades over its nuclear program, with the oil and energy sectors hit the hardest.

"The volume of trade between the two countries has never matched their actual potential," he said, adding that Iran's exports to Kuwait have fallen short of expected levels.

Export obstacles

The primary obstacle, according to

Barari, is transportation logistics. Iranian goods bound for Kuwait follow a combined land-sea route as cargo is trucked to the southern ports of Khorramshahr or Bushehr and then shipped via small vessels to Kuwait. This multimodal process increases shipping costs.

Moreover, most vessels traveling from Iran to Kuwait operate on a one-way basis, returning empty due to the lack of Kuwaiti exports to Iran, further driving up transport expenses.

"Land transport is generally cheaper, but direct overland trade routes between Iran and Kuwait have not yet been established," Barari said. He noted that both countries are however taking steps to establish a land trade route, which, once operational, could increase bilateral trade volumes.

Another barrier, he said, is Kuwait's strict visa policies for Iranian businesspeople and citizens. "On-the-ground presence of Iranian traders in Kuwait is essential for market development and expanding exports," he stressed.

Barari emphasized that Kuwait's market favors high-quality products. "Iranian exporters must pay serious attention to product quality and ensure adequate oversight before shipments are dispatched," he said.

IAC reports undisrupted handling of 3.4m passengers despite US-Israeli threats



Economy Desk

Iranian airports handled 3,437,300 passengers during the ninth month of the current Iranian year (November 22 to December 21), marking a year-on-year increase, according to Iran's Airports and Air Navigation Company (IAC), despite claims of disruption in air services due to US-Israeli threats of aggression against the country.

In a report released Sunday by IRNA, the company said the figure includes traffic at 48 state-owned and 12 non-state-owned airports across the country.

During the same period, a total of 30,958 aircraft movements — landings and takeoffs — were recorded nationwide, reflecting a 3% rise compared to

the corresponding month last year. Of these, 26,605 flights occurred at airports operated by the Airports and Air Navigation Company, also up 3% year-on-year. Passenger traffic at these state-run airports reached 2,947,626, unchanged from the same period in the previous year.

Additionally, 34,114 metric tons of accompanied baggage and postal cargo were transported through the country's airports during the month, an increase of more than 3% compared to the same timeframe last year.

Mehrabad International Airport in Tehran ranked as the busiest airport in the country during the month, recording 9,893 flight movements and handling 1,098,087 departing and arriving passengers.

Tehran to expand intercity rail transport with four new railbus corridors



Economy Desk

Tehran Province is advancing a series of short-term initiatives to boost intercity rail transport, including completing rail lines to Parand and Varamin, establishing seven new intercity stops, overhauling train fleets, launching a suburban rail company, and deploying railbuses across four interprovincial corridors, a senior provincial official said.

Kamal Mirjafarian, the deputy coordinator for civil affairs at Tehran Province, told ISNA that while intercity rail development falls under the mandate of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways Company, the governorate is actively pursuing these measures based on provincial needs. He noted that leveraging existing rail capacity for intercity transport is part of the government's current agenda, with four railbus

corridors stretching from Tehran now under active development.

"These rail capacities will be used to operate railbuses," Mirjafarian said, detailing the four corridors. The first runs from Tehran toward Hashtgerd, with a branch line extending to Baghshan, Shahriar, and Malard. The second extends from Tehran through Robat Karim and Parand, ultimately reaching Hamedan in the west of the country.

The third corridor connects Tehran to Qom in central Iran and will serve both interprovincial and railbus traffic. The fourth heads southeast toward Varamin and Garmar. Currently, around six million intercity trips are made annually by rail in the province. "With the completion of infrastructure — rails, stations, and additional trains — this capacity could increase manyfold," he said.

Files expose Britain's secret D-Notice censorship regime

By Kit Klarenberg
and William Evans
Journalists

INVESTIGATION

Documents obtained by The Grayzone reveal how British soldiers and spies censor news reporting on "national security," coercing reporters into silence. The files show the Committee boasting of a "90% + success rate" in enforcing the official British line on any controversial story — or disappearing reports entirely.

A trove of documents obtained by The Grayzone through freedom of information (foi) requests provide unprecedented insight into Britain's little-known military and intelligence censorship board. The contents lay bare how the secretive Defence and Security Media Advisory (DSMA) Committee censors the output of British journalists, while categorizing independent media as "extremist" for publishing "embarrassing" stories. The body imposes what are known as D-Notices, gag-orders systematically suppressing information available to the public.

The files provide the clearest view to date of the inner workings of the opaque committee, exposing which news items the British national security state has sought to shape or keep from public view. These include the bizarre 2010 death of a GCHQ codebreaker, MI6 and British special forces activity in the Middle East and Africa, the sexual abuse of children by government officials, and the death of Princess Diana. The files show the shadowy Committee maintains an iron grip over the output of legacy British media outlets, transforming British journalists to royal court stenographers. With the Committee having firmly imposed themselves on the editorial process, a wide range of reporters have submitted "apologies" to the board for their media offenses, flaunting their subservience in order to maintain their standing within British mainstream media.

In addition, the documents also show the Committee's intentions to extend the D-Notice system to social media, stating its desire to engage with "tech giants" in a push to suppress revealing disclosures on platforms like Meta and Twitter/X.

How The Grayzone obtained the files

The DSMA Committee describes itself as "an independent advisory body composed of senior civil servants and editors," which brings together representatives of the security services, army, government officials, press association chiefs, senior editors, and reporters. The system forges a potent clientelist rapport between journalists and powerful state agencies, heavily influencing what national security matters get reported on in the mainstream, and how. The Committee also routinely issues so-called "D-Notices," demanding media outlets seek its "advice" before reporting certain stories, or simply asking they avoid particular topics outright.

The DSMA Committee is funded by and housed in Britain's Ministry of Defence (MOD), chaired by the MOD's Director General of Security Policy Paul Wyatt, and 36-year British Army veteran Brigadier Geoffrey Dodds serves as its secretary, raising serious questions about the extent to which British "news" on national security could effectively be written by the Ministry of Defence.

Even though the MOD explicitly retains the right to dismiss its secretary, the DSMA Committee insists it operates independently from the British government. This means the Committee isn't subject to British FOI laws.

So how did The Grayzone obtain these files?

The unprecedented disclosure was the result of an effort by the Committee to assist Australia's government in creating a



D-Notice system of their own. In doing so, it established a paper trail that Canberra was forced to release under its own FOI laws. Australian authorities fought tooth and nail to prevent the documents' release for over five months, until the country's Information Commissioner forced the Department of Home Affairs to release them.

Official 'advice'

The files obtained by The Grayzone comprise records of multiple meetings attended by officials from a variety of Australian government departments and the DSMA Committee, answers from the UK's Committee staff to questions posed by Canberra on how the system functions in practice, and a 36-page report from a 2015 internal DSMA Committee review, which outlines the history of the D-Notice system and includes a comprehensive list of requests for "advice" received and submitted over the previous five years.

The Committee operates simultaneously secretly and above ground. The documents note, "Conversations between the DSMA system and journalists/media organisations are confidential." In fact, the Committee states in a briefing given to Australian officials that it isn't even "required to submit evidence from discussions with media as part of police investigations or court proceedings."

In theory, the system is voluntary, and publications are not legally obliged to comply with the Committee's orders to censor or distort information. But the vast majority of British journalists obey the DSMA Committee's "advice," with nearly all D-notices and advice resulting in stories being spiked or altered.

The Committee's 2015 internal review, which was prompted by the Edward Snowden affair, explained how "in serious cases," the British government can "seek a court injunction" or prosecute journalists who violate Committee advice under the Official Secrets Act — a point the DSMA Secretary, Brig. Dodds, emphasized in meetings with Australian officials. Since then, Britain has introduced sweeping new national security laws, under which journalists and whistleblowers could also face prosecution.

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DSMA conceals MI6 murder of crack codebreaker?

Contained within the internal 2015 DSMA review is a list of examples of "requests for advice" sent to and from the Committee between May 2011 and May 2014. The logs are highly illuminating, revealing the topics about which British reporters felt the need to consult the Committee, and stories the body sought to distort or bury altogether. It is unclear from the document whether particular "requests" entailed the Committee writing to journalists and editors before broadcast and/or publication, or vice versa.

A huge number of requests — 50 in total — were filed in relation to the involvement of British intelligence in the CIA's extraordinary rendition program and related "cooperation" with Muammar Gaddafi's External Security Organization, as well as the inquest into the death of Gareth Williams, a crack GCHQ codebreaker seconded to MI6.

In August 2010, Williams died under extremely strange circumstances in a central London residence owned by Britain's foreign intelligence agency. Williams' death was officially ruled "unnatural and likely to have been criminally mediated". He'd been dead for 10 days by the time his body was discovered in a locked bag in his bathroom.

Inexplicably, neither GCHQ nor MI6 had alerted authorities to the codebreaker's prolonged absence from work. It was only when his sister informed GCHQ he was missing the agencies alerted police — following an unexplained five-hour delay. Investigating detectives were subsequently prohibited from interviewing Williams' spy agency colleagues, or reviewing relevant documents.

The British press quickly moved on from the case, despite the coroner stating that MI6 involvement in Williams' death was a "legitimate line of inquiry" which had not been satisfactorily explored by authorities. In the years since, unsubstantiated conspiracy theories claiming Russia was somehow responsible for his murder have widely proliferated, while the deeply suspect conduct of Williams' British intelligence employers has been forgotten by UK media — a trend that could potentially be

attributed to DSMA interventions.

The files also show how from May to November of 2011, 29 requests related to "intel agencies" were lodged. This included "Libyan involvement," no doubt a reference to MI6 and SAS operatives being captured infiltrating the country as Tripoli descended into the chaos of a Western-sponsored proxy war. There were 16 requests pertaining to "Wikileaks," as well as "D For Discretion," a BBC radio program examining the DSMA Committee's operations. Whether this reflects the British state broadcaster asking the Committee for information, or journalists wanting guidance for reporting on its contents, is unclear.

Between November 2011 and May 2012, the DSMA issued advice on 14 occasions related to special forces involvement in the London Olympics, and a "failed hostage rescue [operation] in Nigeria". This references a botched March 2012 Special Boat Service effort to save a pair of European kidnapping victims held by Boko Haram, which collapsed when they were executed by their captors. Details of the raid reported in the media varied from outlet to outlet, suggesting conflicting information may have been provided by the Committee. There were also a number of "miscellaneous" inquiries related to "Porton Down 'victims'". It's unclear why the phrase "victims" was presented in inverted commas as it's well-established that numerous highly unethical human experiments were conducted over decades at Porton Down, Britain's leading biological and chemical warfare research institute. In at least one case, a Porton Down test subject was unlawfully killed after being exposed to nerve agents. Much like the victims of the CIA's MKULTRA mind control program, many British soldiers were secretly dosed with LSD at the facility throughout the 1960s.

'Intel agencies' and Princess Diana's death

From May to November 2012, the Committee handled requests relating to "alleged [British special forces] involvement in Syria". It was widely speculated that British special forces were present in Syria at this time, though few details have emerged since.

Concurrently, the DSMA was also preoccupied with the mysterious shooting in September 2012 of members of the Iraqi-British al-Hilli family in the French Alps. The case remains unsolved today, but in February, Paris suggested an "elite" Swiss special forces soldier "who went off the rails" may have been responsible.

The November 2012 to May 2013 period saw requests over a "possible [special forces] rescue op in Nigeria," a "PQ" — personal question? — regarding a "paedo," and the March 1996 Dunblane Massacre in which known pedophile Thomas Hamilton murdered 16 children and their teacher at a Scottish primary school. Police reports on Hamilton linking him to influential local figures and historic sex abuse were inexplicably sealed for 100 years, and the mass shooting prompted a national ban on handguns.

Between May and November 2013, seven requests regarding "special forces" were filed in relation to the August 1997 death of Princess Diana. Incredibly, a combined total of 85 "intel agency" requests surfaced on Diana's passing, and NSA leaker Edward Snowden's revelations. In a disquieting testament to the DSMA Committee's efficacy, the British media almost entirely ignored the *Guardian's* reporting on Snowden's leaks.

What remains uncertain is what intelligence-connected information the Committee dealt with related to the death of Princess Diana.

"Miscellaneous" requests during this time period involved a parliamentarian visiting a brothel, "Scottish independence," and the case of Hollie Greig, a woman with Down's

People exit the United Kingdom's Ministry of Defense's main building in London.

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The files provide the clearest view to date of the inner workings of the opaque committee, exposing which news items the British national security state has sought to shape or keep from public view. These include the bizarre 2010 death of a GCHQ codebreaker, MI6 and British special forces activity in the Middle East and Africa, the sexual abuse of children by government officials, and the death of Princess Diana.

DA Notice Requests for Advice – May-Nov 12			
Subject Area	Serial Numbers	Comments	Total
Special Forces	1795, 1796, 1797, 1806, 1808, 1815, 1823, 1830, 1843,	Olympics, planned SF rescue op in Afghanistan, alleged SF involvement in Syria	9
Intel Agencies	1793, 1798, 1800, 1801, 1802, 1804, 1807, 1809, 1811, 1812, 1813, 1814, 1822, 1827, 1828, 1829, 1833, 1836, 1839, 1840, 1842, 1848, 1850, 1851, 1858	Naming, DPBAC meeting with C,	25
Current and Recent Military	1831, 1847, 1855,	Northern Ireland troubles	3



Edward Snowden, the former employee of the National Security Agency (NSA) of the United States that leaked sensitive information.

Syndrome who alleged she was a victim of a child sex abuse ring involving influential Scottish figures, including police, judges, and other prominent individuals. The deaths of three SAS operatives from heatstroke during a dangerous mountain training exercise in July 2013 was also subject to Committee "advice". Finally, the document lists requests during November 2013-May 2014. This again included "Snowden disclosures", alongside "MPS [Metropolitan Police] and child pornography," and Operation Ore. Operation Ore saw thousands arrested on charges of downloading pedophilic content in the early 2000s. However, many were found innocent, numerous prosecutions fell apart, dozens of potentially falsely accused Britons committed suicide, and much of the crackdown's evidentiary basis was demonstrated to be likely fraudulent.

Apologies received' from servile journalists

While the files show a shocking number of salacious stories were handpicked for censorship by the DSMA, just as alarming is the submissiveness with which mainstream "journalists" greet the DSMA Committee's edicts.

Incredibly, public minutes of Committee meetings regularly feature "apologies... received from" numerous journalists. Presumably, these wayward reporters neglected to consult the DSMA before publishing a particular story, or let certain information seep into the public domain the Committee wasn't happy about.

At one stage, in a written response to questions from Australia's Attorney-General's Department, DSMA Secretary Dodds crowed how reporters "very rarely" fail to follow its "advice", and if outlets do "publish information that may be harmful to national security," the Committee can demand the offending article's removal.

The DSMA Secretary indicated that approximately 90% of the UK media view the DSMA System positively," the report stated, adding that the few renegade journalists "who are not supportive of the system" are "mostly the strongest proponents of media freedom".

According to figures cited in Ian Cobain's 2016 book *The History Thieves*, British reporters voluntarily submit 80–90% of stories they believe could be of interest to the Committee for official examination and potential state censorship, in advance of publication.

The documents provide an up-close view of the censorship process, showing how the DSMA Committee carries out "one-on-one" consultations with journalists that go beyond mere advice, and refers to the use of "track changes," a feature in word processor software that allows users to suggest edits and add commentary.

In extraordinary circumstances, such as the Snowden revelations, the Committee would issue its "advice" to "all editors" of major British outlets, though it cautioned such a measure could backfire and generate "increasing media awareness" of a topic deemed off-limits.

DSMA Secretary Dodds described the consideration of "public interest" as being "of no concern when issuing advice".

The DSMA Committee is a uniquely British institution — at once operating in plain sight but virtually hidden from public view

- The DSMA Secretary indicated that approximately 90% of the UK media view the DSMA System positively. Those in the media industry who are not supportive of the system are mostly the strongest proponents of media freedom.

Minutes from a meeting between Australian officials and the DSMA Secretary noted near-universal cooperation with Committee censorship among UK media.

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review, which explicitly stated the Committee was uninterested in "information that may cause political and official embarrassment".

From the British government's perspective — and the DSMA Committee's by extension — the proliferation of inconvenient information is deeply problematic. As the briefing notes, "the DSMA system is a UK system operating in a globalised world," and "the prevalence of digital media means that UK information can be published in other countries, and there is no recourse for the DSMA to prevent this." However, "In the main, overseas publication of UK national security information rarely happens."

The 2015 internal review of the D-Notice system saw the "national context and culture" of Britain — where journalists generally have little access to top decision makers and are largely happy to accept government instruction — as "key determinants" to upholding the censorship regime.

In the "UK context," the review states, "general access by the media to government sources of information is more tightly controlled," and there is an "expectation that contacts will usually be through government press officers". This means contact between high-ranking government officials and media is restricted to a "limited number of trusted journalists and media organisations," and any access to noteworthy government sources is the "exception rather than the rule".

Notably, in correspondence between the DSMA Secretary and Australian officials, the secretary said the media's "[interpretation] of the purpose of the [D-Notice] system" was to be able to "publish/broadcast information it wants to" without "damaging national security" implying that the press was entrusted with protecting the secrets of Britain's intelligence agencies and military.

This dynamic was confirmed in a 2015 op-ed by DSMA vice-chair Simon Bucks, who praised the "collaborative spirit" of the "system... run by ex-military top brass, whose job was to arbitrate between journalists and officials". Bucks proudly proclaimed that this system had "worked for a century".

Minutes of an April 2023 DSMA Committee meeting note the body's deputy secretary lamented the "extreme sensitivity (in national security terms) of some of the material" that the Committee prevented from being reported by the British media over the past six months. He added that some of this material "had been of the most sensitive nature he had seen" since joining the Committee.

During this same timeframe, The Grayzone published a series of reports on London's secret, central role in the Ukraine proxy war. These incendiary exposés received significant international attention, and were reported on by media outlets the world over — apart from Britain.

In private discussions with Canberra revealed by the FOI files, the Committee repeatedly stated "no DSMA action" is taken on "information widely available in the public domain," and "the DSMA Secretary does not advise" on such matters. Nonetheless, minutes of an April 2023 Committee appear to contradict these claims.

Advice To Journalists

Form of Advice:

- One to one/two: verbal, track changes, email (on separate, unclass IT).
- All editors: formal email (formal supplementary notice to all editors). But need to balance effect of supp notice with increasing media awareness.

Topics or Issues: Mainly: SPI, impending military action, methods & techniques. But depends on mil and security activity. Eg: Afghanistan – mil plans capabilities intentions

Public Interest: Of no concern when issuing advice. Focus is on the agreed text in the standing notices.

The records single out a journalist who was successfully pressured into not publishing information about a British Army unit "about to deploy on operations overseas," in an unstated country. Despite complying, the journalist argued the presence of British forces in the region "was widely known" in the country itself, formed "part of a very large international coalition effort," and "there was open-source evidence to prove it".

As such, "the availability online of commercially available overhead imagery as well as photographs and videos with tracking data meant information previously the preserve of national intelligence effort was freely available to all in real time." This was no deterrent to DSMA intervention, however.

DSMA seeks expansion into social media

Though social media's "partnership" with traditional British media has been effectively cemented, the Committee still views it as a problematic area that has evaded its system of narrative control. The 2015 internal review contains several lengthy passages identifying "new digital media" as a threat to the system's very existence, citing WikiLeaks releases of Afghanistan and Iraq war files and Snowden's leaks as examples. These revelations were said to "demonstrate the difficulty of exercising any kind of restraint through the [D-Notice] system" in the online age.

While the British media largely overlooked these disclosures, the internet had created a "global public domain," providing information that news outlets outside the country could cover. To limit the damage of these disclosures, the Committee's review proposes the inclusion of "representatives of new digital media" within the DSMA collective. However, it acknowledged that suppressing social media would be a tall task. Minutes from a 2022 meeting between Australian officials and the secretary also outline these worries: "globalised media" and "reluctance of digital industry" prevent the D-Notice system from working effectively, and that he believed that "tech giants" did not want to engage with him because they wanted to "settle a bargain with [the UK] government".

A written briefing noted that Britain's DSMA was the "only [such] system in a globalized information arena," and described the need for the "tech giants" to "strike a grand bargain" with the British government as one of its ongoing "challenges".

In February 2024, Politico reported that the Committee was "trying to woo Big Tech" through outreach efforts to Google, Meta, X, and other social media giants.

At the moment, governments can request social media platforms remove content if it violates local laws or platform rules. But the Committee wants to impose a much more draconian regime of information control, compelling tech firms to monitor their platforms for content that might be covered by D-Notices, and actively seek its advice on whether to censor it. DSMA Secretary Dodds told Politico that tech giants "won't have anything to do with us" but expressed hope state internet regulation "could create potential leverage" the Committee might exploit.

Despite what the DSMA Committee perceives as the "reluctance" of "resistant" social networks to engage with the Committee, they remained undeterred in trying to court them into the system. The DSMA Secretary told Politico the future news landscape will necessarily entail "continued increase in social media" and online publications, "so we need to get into this game." Given that the Committee has so effectively infiltrated every major newsroom in Britain, exploiting its censorship system to influence the coverage of international events, it is almost certain to escalate its push for social media suppression.

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"The DSMA Secretary indicated that approximately 90% of the UK media view the DSMA System positively," the report stated, adding that the few renegade journalists "who are not supportive of the system" are "mostly the strongest proponents of media freedom".

According to figures cited in Ian Cobain's 2016 book *The History Thieves*, British reporters voluntarily submit 80–90% of stories they believe could be of interest to the Committee for official examination and potential state censorship, in advance of publication.



The DSMA Secretary's response to Australian Attorney-General's Department inquiries reveal how the Committee interfered in editorial decisions at a granular level.

THE GRAYZONE

The article first appeared on The Grayzone.

Asian Men's Handball Championship: Iran routs Australia to revive main-round hopes

Sports Desk

Iran bounced back from a first-day setback against Saudi Arabia to rout Australia 39-13 in Group D of the Asian Men's Handball Championship in Kuwait on Saturday.

Mehran Rahnama topped the scoring chart 10 goals, with Ali Heidarian and Milad Qalandari contributing with eight and six goals, respectively, while Pouya Norouzinejad was named the Man of the Match.

Caleb Gahan was Australia's top scorer with seven goals.

The victory lifted Iran to second in the group table on two points, thanks to a superior goal differ-

ence over Japan, ahead of the winner-takes-all meeting between the two sides today.

The game will be a rematch of the of main-round encounter at the previous edition, which two-time champion Japan won 25-23 before ultimately falling to Qatar in the final.

Four-time bronze medalist Saudi Arabia, which had beaten Iran 24-22 in their opener on Thursday, defeated Japan 27-24 later on Saturday to seal qualification for the next round ahead of today's dead-rubber against Australia.

The top two teams from each of the four groups will advance to the main round, where they

will be divided into two groups of four.

Elsewhere, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates maintained their perfect run with a second successive victory in Group C to book a place in the main round. The host country eased to a 39-25 win against Hong Kong to sit atop the group table, while the UAE hammered India 43-21.

The top spot in the group will be at stake when Kuwait and the UAE go head-to-head today. The 22nd edition of the flagship continental event also serves as the World Championship qualifiers, with the four semifinalists punching tickets for the 2027 showpiece in Germany.



IRIHF

Golmohammadi departs as Foolad head coach



ALI SHARIFZADEH/IRNA

Sports Desk

Yahya Golmohammadi has left his role as head coach of Foolad Khuszestan "by mutual agreement," the Persian Gulf Pro League club announced on Saturday.

The decision followed Foolad's goalless draw at home against fifth-placed Chadormalou on Friday, as the Iranian top flight resumed after the mid-season break. The result left Foolad 11th in the 16-team table with 17 points from 16 matches – only three wins so far – and four points above the relegation zone.

The move surprised many Iranian football fans, coming after a busy transfer window in which Foolad signed Esteghlal full-back Ramin Rezaeian on loan, Persepolis winger Farshad Ahmadzadeh, and Brazilian striker Matheus Costa from Mes Rafsanjan.

A three-time domestic league champion as Persepolis manager, Golmohammadi took over at Foolad at the start of last season after the club had narrowly avoided relegation on the final day of the 2023/24 campaign. He led them to an impressive fourth-place finish.

Hamid Motahari, a number two to Golmohammadi on Foolad bench, is expected to take charge as the caretaker manager for the remainder of the season, starting with a visit to Malavan on Thursday.

Sepahan stumbles against Malavan

Meanwhile, league leader Sepahan was held to a frustrating goalless draw by Malavan at the Naqsh-e Jahan Stadium in Isfahan on Saturday. The visitors played most of the second half with 10 men after Malavan midfielder Gholamreza Sabet-Imani was shown a straight red card for a heavy challenge on Sepahan striker Kaveh Rezaei five minutes after halftime.

Mohammad Daneshgar thought he

had given Sepahan the lead in the

66th minute, but his goal was disallowed by VAR after Milad Zakipour

was judged to have handled the ball

in the buildup.

Sepahan stays top with 31 points,

three clear of second-placed Persepolis ahead of the Tehran Reds' visit to Fajr Sepasi on Sunday.

In other matches, bottom-side Mes Rafsanjan staged a dramatic comeback to beat Khaybar 2-1. After falling behind to Mohsen Sefid-Ghoqaei's 56th-minute opener, Mes struck twice in four minutes late in the game through Alireza Afkham and Farnam Arab to secure only its second win of the season.

Paykan made a strong start to the second half of the campaign, defeating Zob Ahan 2-0 at home thanks to late goals from Hojjat Ahmadi and Farid Amiri. The win lifts Paykan to 10th with 18 points, while Zob Ahan remains in 14th on 14.

Greco-Roman coach Bana aiming to end Azerbaijan's Olympic gold drought

Sports Desk

Newly appointed head coach Mohammad Bana has set his sights on ending Azerbaijan's long wait for an Olympic gold medal after taking charge of the wrestling powerhouse's Greco-Roman national team.

Azerbaijan last claimed an Olympic Greco-Roman gold through Farid Mansurov in the 66kg weight class at Athens 2004. Bana was officially unveiled by the Azerbaijan Wrestling Federation last week, marking his return to a major coaching role since parting ways with Iran's national team following a below-par campaign at the 2022 World Championships in Belgrade, where his 10-man squad won two silver medals and one bronze, finishing fourth in the team standings.

The federation highlighted Bana's distinguished record in its announcement: "Under Bana's leadership, the Iranian national team won three gold medals at the London 2012 Olympic Games – a record in Iranian wrestling. At Tokyo 2020, the same team secured one gold and one bronze. In 2011, Bana was named the world's best coach by United World Wrestling."

It added, "He is regarded as one of the most successful and respected head coaches in Greco-Roman wrestling history. Bana's coaching philosophy is built on systematic training, discipline, tactical thinking, and psychological resilience."

The 67-year-old will be joined in Azerbaijan by fellow Iranian coaches Sabah Shariati, Bahrouz Hazratipur, and Ra-

soul Chazini.

"I am very happy to have been selected as head coach of the Azerbaijan national team," Bana said after signing his contract. "This is a very strong team that has consistently won medals on the world stage. The responsibility is significant, but together with our selected staff, we are working with great determination.

"I hope we can not only maintain the high level of Azerbaijani wrestling but also elevate it further. There is a medal that has been elusive for 23 years. Now, our aim is to achieve even greater success by winning an Olympic gold. God willing, through our planned programs, the qual-

ity of wrestling will improve day by day." He outlined the team's clear objective: "In our discussions with the leadership of the Azerbaijan Wrestling Federation, our main goal has been clearly defined – to focus entirely on winning Olympic gold. We face two major challenges ahead, and we intend to overcome them. Our priority is to follow a correct and effective path over the remaining two years leading to the Games.

"This journey will bring various accomplishments, but ultimately, we want to reach Olympic gold. I am proud to be here and to shoulder this great responsibility."



Iranian coach Mohammad Bana (l) poses for a photo after taking charge of the Azerbaijani Greco-Roman national team in Baku, Azerbaijan, on January 12, 2025.

AWF

Iran's Pakdaman stands 26th in FIE World Rankings

Sports Desk

Iranian saber captain Ali Pakdaman is ranked 26th in the latest FIE World Rankings, released by the International Fencing Federation on Sunday.

The 35-year-old, who holds 67.000 ranking points, last competed at the FIE Grand Prix event in Tunis earlier this month, where he fell in the round of 32 after a narrow 15-14 loss to Hungary's fifth-seed Krisztian Rabb.



ISNA

Meanwhile, fellow Iranian Mohammad Fotouhi dropped to 123rd in the men's saber rankings, two places ahead of compatriot Nima Zahedi, who was eliminated in the pool stage in Tunis.

Georgian fencer Sandro Bazadze leads the world rankings with 224.000 points, tied with France's Jean-Philippe Patrice in second. Another French fencer, Sebastien Patrice, who beat Rabb 15-11 in the Tunis final, is third with 178.000 points.

Zanjan's knife-making as highly-reputed craft nationwide, abroad



Iranica Desk

Approximately 700 knife-making workshops are active across Zanjan Province, producing six million knives annually.

Announcing the above, Dariush Naderi, deputy head of Zanjan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, stated that the province is known as the hub for manufacturing metal handicrafts, including knives, copperware, and filigree.

He said that due to its high quality and unique design, Zanjan's knife-making art is renowned across the country and even internationally, according to chtn.ir. He noted that 116 knife-making licenses were issued in the first nine months of the current Iranian year (March 21–December 21, 2025), reflecting the industry's significance in the province. He added that around 57 to 60 million

knives are sold nationwide each year, indicating strong public demand for various types of knives — such as fruit knives, kitchen knives, and cleavers.

"This shows that the industry holds significant potential for generating employment in the province," he said. For centuries, Zanjan Province has been renowned for its high-quality knives, crafted by skilled artisans. Historical evidence indicates that the tradition of knife-making in the region dates back to the era of the Salt Men, with knives discovered among archaeological artifacts, highlighting a long-standing legacy. Zanjan knives represent some of the earliest and most significant documentation of the local knife-making industry. They are celebrated for their distinctive qualities — elegance, balance, blade coating, and cutting power

— showcasing the craftsmanship of both past and present artisans. During the Safavid era, masters like Abdolghaffar Sekak greatly contributed to the prosperity of this vital industry. Additionally, credible records from the National Archives and Library reveal correspondence from 1944 CE listing the names and signatures of 31 Zanjan knife makers. Today, the knife-making industry in Zanjan continues to thrive, facing both challenges and triumphs. Some artisans have established notable reputations through their exceptional work, while others are dedicated to preserving this authentic craft for future generations. These artisans carefully consider their clients' preferences, producing a diverse range of knife models in various sizes and shapes. Some feature decorative handles, making them ideal for display in museums or as collector's items.

IRNA

Torbat-e Jam set to thrive as tourist destination

Iranica Desk

The head of the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Department of Torbat-e Jam, Khorasan Razavi Province, said that the city, with its great tourism potential, needs more accommodation facilities and ground has been paved for cooperation with the private sector's investors in this regard.

Faramarz Saberemoqadam said in interview with ISNA that the services provided in four rural ecolodges and one guesthouse, which are presently active in Torbat-e Jam, are continuously being evaluated. The assessment not

only contributes to improving services but also helps strengthen the region's tourism brand, ISNA wrote.

He noted that the accommodation units, as the key components of the city's tourism infrastructure, play a significant role in attracting travelers, saying that they should provide high quality services to ensure guests' satisfaction.

He stated that in the monitoring and evaluation process, various indicators are examined, including continuation of their activities, environmental hygiene, structural safety, guest satisfaction, the way required services

are received and provided, manners of dealing with tourists and the alignment of activities with legal regulations.

Saberemoqadam emphasized that in addition to evaluating the performance of accommodation units, specialized consultations and necessary trainings are also provided to their managers, noting if any violations are observed, legal warnings will be issued and the process of resolving the problems will be pursued.

"With the cooperation of users and officials, we hope to provide better experiences for travelers and enhance the status of Torbat-e Jam as a popular tourist

destination. We are trying to introduce Torbat-e Jam which hosts 67 nationally registered historical sites and landscapes as the tourism hub of eastern part of Khorasan Razavi Province," he said, adding that over 130 more ancient sites have also been identified across the city.

The border city of Torbat-e Jam, with 154 villages each having over 20 households, has a population of 230,000, of which 125,000 are urban dwellers. The center of the city is located 160 kilometers southeast of the provincial capital city of Mashhad and shares a border with Afghanistan to the east.



IRNA

Khatoon; 6,000-year-old female skeleton buried with symbols of justice

Iranica Desk

Archaeologists discovered a cemetery containing over 5,000 graves in Chega Sofla, a site in the southeastern part of Khuzestan Province, about a decade ago. Among the graves was the skeleton of a woman, nicknamed Khatoon, buried with remarkable order and respect. Two symbolic objects — a stone weight and a sword — were placed beside her skeleton, a combination evoking the image of the Goddess of Justice. According to ISNA, Chega Sofla was identified by a delegation from the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago in Behbahan, Khuzestan Province, during the 1970s. Since then, the site has been recognized as one of the most important cultural landmarks in the Persian Gulf region. Archaeological findings indicate that the site dates back to the early 5th millennium BCE. Kamiar Abdi, an archaeologist, visited the artifacts unearthed at Chega Sofla in 2009, and the site was registered on Iran's National Her-



chtir

itage List in the same year. After a prolonged hiatus, Iranian archaeologists returned to Chega Sofla in 2015 and uncovered more than 5,000 graves, 10 of which were constructed from bricks. Several mass burial tombs were also discovered, including two containing 52 and 120 human skeletons, respectively. Abbas Moqadam, the archae-

ologist who led the excavation team at the historical cemetery of Chega Sofla, stated, "In addition to individual graves, we have identified stone and brick mass burial sites. Evidence suggests that some skeletons were reburied in these tombs, while others remain in their original state." A 6,000-year-old skeleton was found in one of the individu-

al graves. The woman, nicknamed Khatoon, approximately 25 years old at the time of her death, was buried in a fetal or foetal-like position. Alongside her skeleton, archaeologists discovered a large bronze cauldron, a bronze jar, a hairpin, two marble bowls, a clay cup, a dagger, a large sword, and a significant number of weav-

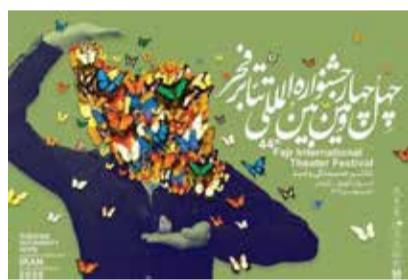
ing hooks. A stone weight was placed near her forehead. Studies suggest these items were buried with her to serve her in the afterlife. Khatoon was initially transferred to the Susa Museum, devoid of artifacts. The cultural heritage items were initially under the custody of the Ramborz Cultural Heritage Department. However, in 2021, the artifacts were transferred to the Susa Museum and placed beside her skeleton. She was not the only woman found in the ancient cemetery. The prominence of women in burial practices was one of the most striking aspects of social structure in this ancient Iranian society. Archaeologists have identified a total of 102 burials, more than half of which were belonged to women. Evidence suggests that women held a higher status and played decisive roles. One of the most recent burials in a brick-made grave included 11 individuals, with a woman among them. Furthermore, among the distorted skulls, female specimens outnumber male ones — a finding that paints a clear

picture of a female-centric social structure in this society. Archaeologists have determined that the people of Chega Sofla were skilled artisans: metalworkers, potters, stonecutters, spinners, and artists who lived in a fully self-sufficient manner. Findings indicate that this society maintained extensive connections with distant regions and imported raw materials such as marble from faraway places. Chega Sofla still holds many secrets yet to be uncovered, and archaeological research in the area remains incomplete. However, according to Moqadam, the site has suffered several attacks over the past half-century. Initially, British and American oil companies identified the area as a suitable location for temporary accommodation of their staff. After land reforms and the redistribution of land to peasants, small villages gradually occupied the site, with farmers building homes on it. In recent years, the site has suffered damage under the pretext of agricultural development and urban expansion.

Minister calls theater vital for truth, survival of civilization

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Abbas Salehi on Saturday framed theater as a vital pillar for any civilization, calling the art form indispensable for uncovering truth and fostering critique during times of national crisis. Speaking at the opening ceremony of the 44th Fajr International Theater Festival in the historic city of Kerman, Salehi laid out a sweeping vision of Iran's millennia-old affinity for narrative and performance,



mance, IRNA reported.

He said the country's ancient soil had always nurtured storytelling, from the tales of ancient Persia to contemporary stages. "Why has this land had so many stories over thousands of years?" Salehi asked the audience. He traced a direct line from storytellers in ancient Jundi Shapur, who recited narratives to treat the sick, to the great poet Attar and the hundreds of tales within the Masnavi.

"Iran is a land of stories and performance," he stated. The minister argued that civilizations themselves are built and sustained through such narratives. He cited a newspaper from Iran's Constitutional Era, named 'Theater', which posited that education and civilization rest on three pillars: School, newspaper, and theater. "If a civilization is to form and develop, it needs the art of theater," Salehi asserted.

He positioned theater as a crucial tool for



Iran's Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Abbas Salehi speaks at the opening ceremony of the 44th Fajr International Theater Festival in Kerman, on January 17, 2026.

● IRNA

societal introspection, particularly when nations face threats. "Where civilizations are threatened between endurance and decline, theater helps narrate the truth," Salehi said.

He pointed to Iran's own "sacred defense" period – referring to the 1980-88 war with Iraq – and more recent conflicts as times when theater's role becomes paramount. The art form's second crucial function, he contended, is to foster essential dialogue and criticism. "A civilization without criticism rots from within like termites," Salehi warned, adding that theater prevents a nation or a society from internal decay by providing a genuine platform for expression.



The 44th Fajr International Theater Festival, which runs in Kerman and Teh-

ran until late January, hosted five major sections in Kerman this year.

Ammar Popular Festival to screen 300 films, framed as cultural 'counter-narrative'

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Ammar Popular Film Festival will screen 300 films in competition this year, the festival's executive secretary, Mohammad Hosseini Sabouri said on Sunday, framing the event as a cultural rebuttal to Western criticism.

The event kicks off on January 22 at Tehran's Bahman Cinema, with daily screenings running until January 29, Defa Press reported.

The secretariat received over 3,040 submissions for its documentary, fiction, and music video categories.

Saeed Khorshidi, head of the festival's policy council, used a press conference to cast the gathering as a display of Iran's "cultural technology" and soft power.

He positioned it as a di-



rect challenge to narratives of a fatigued Iranian society.

"We invite those who try to portray Iranian society as tired and stagnant to see these works," Khorshidi stated.

The festival's thematic focus is firmly rooted in Iran's revolutionary narrative. Officials said it would "narrate the conquest" of the Iranian people, referencing the date of January 12, which marks the rally

A display of burned Qur'an pages is seen during a press conference for the 16th Ammar Popular Film Festival in Tehran, Iran, January 18, 2026.

● TASMIN

condemning the recent foreign-backed riots across the country. Khorshidi tied the event symbolically to Tehran's Abuzar Mosque, a site he said recalls the people's "awakening" against past "seditions" and a recent

arson attack by "rioters." He also cited the Leader's recent speech, arguing Iran now operates from a "higher level" than mere soft power. The festival, Khorshidi claimed, provides a "frame" to see the representation of Iran's combined hard and soft power, calling it a "counter-example" that invalidates claims by foreign and domestic enemies.

A special section titled "Iranian Dream" will showcase works by intellectuals, while a segment on the "12-Day War" – a reference to recent border conflicts – prompted such a volume of submissions that organizers considered holding two annual festivals. The event will also feature two dedicated screenings for deaf audiences.

Iran to give fuel cards to foreign tourists for overland travel

Social Desk

Iran's government has agreed in principle to issue fuel cards to foreign tourists entering the country by private car, a senior tourism official said on Sunday, aiming to boost visitor numbers and spread economic benefits beyond major cities.

Moslem Shojaei, director-general of marketing and advertising at Iran's Tourism Ministry, said that the specialized fuel cards would be sold at international rates, not subsidized domestic prices.

He expects the scheme to be operational by the end of the current Iranian year in March 2026, ILNA reported.

"This tackles a key hurdle for overland tourism," Shojaei said. The move is part of a push to attract 15 million annual visitors. "We're turning to capacities that are lower-cost, more accessible, and more sustainable," he added. Iran shares land borders with



15 neighbors. Tourists driving in, often with families, stay longer and visit more destinations than air arrivals, Shojaei noted. "They stop in cities like Arak and use local services, which has a direct economic impact," he said. The plan, drafted with the Oil Ministry and the Planning and Budget Organization, recently cleared the government's economic commission. Final edits are now being made. The National Iranian Oil Products Distribution Company will run the scheme.

Shojaei dismissed concerns about fuel smuggling, saying the globally-priced cards would curb, not encourage, illicit trade. "It makes no sense for a foreign tourist to use subsidized fuel," he said.

The initiative follows existing mechanisms for commercial trucks and buses. Shojaei argued it would ensure "subsidy justice" while generating hard currency and improving Iran's travel image abroad.

Ain al-Asad evacuation signals ...

Therefore, one of the key considerations for the US is that any aggression against Iran, or any operation involving the country, could trigger a response targeting this base. Consequently, the US has attempted to mitigate potential casualties and, as it's said, pull out the base.

However, reports also suggest that alternative facilities have been deployed to the base, featuring a reduced human presence. Regardless, the US will likely adopt similar precautionary measures for its various bases. It's evident that US forces in the region will move out more quickly from countries where local opposition to their presence is strong. This could be perceived as a signal that the US is concerned about Iranian retaliation should any action be taken by the US.

However, domestic conditions in Iraq also

appear to be a major factor in the base's evacuation, as political forces opposed to the presence can quickly react should the US undertake action against neighboring countries.

In its broader strategy, the US tends to avoid direct involvement in the defense activities of its allied countries in the region, preferring to hand over defense to those countries themselves. Yet, Iraq is an exception to this rule, and this principle has not necessarily driven the decision to evacuate Ain al-Asad.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has characterized this move as a sign of strengthened Iraqi independence and has welcomed the action. To what extent does this assessment align with the realities on the ground in Iraq, and what new opportunities and threats does it create

for Iran's national interests?

Iraq has established a strategic cooperation framework with the US, under which US combat forces in Iraq were intended to have a minimal presence, focusing instead on providing training on advanced technologies. Therefore, the withdrawal of these forces can also be seen as a step toward implementing this framework, as parliamentarians have repeatedly called for the departure of foreign forces, primarily US, allied, and occasionally Turkish forces. Parliament has consistently emphasized and continues to emphasize the implementation of this resolution, and the Iraqi government is obligated to respect and enforce parliamentary resolutions. Therefore, if the withdrawal is seen as part of the implementation of the Iraqi parliament's resolutions, it can certainly be interpreted as a positive sign of Iraq's

desire for independence.

For Iran, if this withdrawal is genuine and fully implemented, it will naturally reduce the threat to the Islamic Republic in this geographic area. However, the situation would be different if these troops were simply relocated to Syria or the Kurdistan Region, as that would be seen as a way of circumventing the Iraqi parliament's resolutions.

How do you analyze the recent meeting between the Iranian and Iraqi foreign ministers amid current domestic and social tensions in Iran? What messages does this meeting convey to domestic, regional, and international actors?

Most political factions in Iraq are unwilling to see Iraq become a source of conflict or, potentially, a tool for exerting pressure

on Iran. Therefore, the foreign minister's visit can be seen as a valuable opportunity for Baghdad to pronounce its policies and stances regarding this issue, especially as Trump continues to threaten the Islamic Republic of Iran. This visit can be a signal to the US regarding the potential escalation of tensions between Iran and Iraq, which could lead to the expansion of conflict to the entire region and parts of Iraqi territory that host US forces and could be subject to Iran's retaliatory measures. Furthermore, it will send a message to other countries in the region that if their territories or airspace become a venue for conflict against Iran, they could face repercussions. Therefore, it can be interpreted as a clear and constructive signal that other countries should also distance themselves from the effects of the current crisis.