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Nouri al-Maliki, fit for Iraq's premiership, yet facing immense challenges

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE



The Coordination Framework, a coalition of Shia political groups, has put forward Nouri al-Maliki as its nominee for Iraq's premiership. A seasoned Shia politician with close ties to Iran, Al-Maliki's selection has garnered support from factions like the Kurdistan Democratic Party, but has also drawn fire from Sunni parties. Simultaneously, reports of escalating US pressure on Iraq, specifically targeting Shia groups and regarding the disarmament of resistance groups have surfaced, complicating the already volatile political landscape. In an interview with Iran Daily, Reza Qazvini, an expert on Iraqi affairs, argued that Al-Maliki's selection, amidst such a sensitive and tense climate, is a proper move. According to him, Al-Maliki is a decisive figure who can engage in meaningful and serious dialogue with various groups, both within and outside Iraq.

IRAN DAILY: What's your assessment of the potential impact on Iraq's political future in the wake of Al-Maliki's selection? Could this lead to stability and unity, or exacerbate existing divisions and tensions?

Qazvini: The situation Iraq finds itself in is exceptionally sensitive. I believe this selection is made within the framework of these highly sensitive conditions and the regional situation. While a consensus wasn't fully achieved within the Framework – he was elected by a majority, not unanimous vote – it generally reflects a widespread understanding among Shia leaders of the current realities. They've chosen Al-Maliki as a strong, decisive figure capable of engaging in serious dialogue with various groups inside and outside Iraq.

There have been disagreements, both among Sunni and Shia factions within the Coordination Framework, regarding Al-Maliki's selection. Conversely, powerful forces among Sunni and Kurdish groups have also voiced their support. Whether he can foster unity and create a stable domestic political environment remains to be seen, and will depend on the policies he pursues. For a strong and empowered prime minister, one who can wield authority in negotiations with both domestic and foreign parties and gain their trust, I believe this is a suitable choice. Iraq does not need a director-general, but a powerful leader. The presence of individuals beholden to their own political factions or regional power centers could be detrimental to Iraq.



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Iranian lawmakers rap EU Parliament's anti-Tehran resolution

'European countries cannot evade accountability for role in Iran terrorist acts'

International Desk

Iranian lawmakers in a statement on Sunday strongly condemned an anti-Iran resolution adopted by the European Parliament, saying that the European countries cannot evade accountability for their role in recent terrorist acts against the Iranian people.

"The European Parliament and the meddlesome European countries bear direct legal and political responsibility for supporting, facilitating, and paving the way for terrorist acts against the Iranian people and cannot evade accountability to the Iranian nation and world public opinion," the Iranian lawmakers emphasized.

In a resolution adopted on Thursday, members of the European Parliament expressed what they described as "full solidarity" with Iranians during recent protests over economic problems while calling for the designation of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps as a terrorist organization. The Iranian lawmakers said the resolution by the European Parliament was a clear example of interference in Iran's internal affairs.

The statement added that continuing such a "hostile and irresponsible" approach would not weaken the Iranian nation's resolve but would instead further damage the political and moral credibility of European authorities in the eyes of the world. It emphasized that the European Parliament, having failed to resolve the EU's internal problems, now resorts to a policy of projection and interfering in other nations' affairs to cover up its failures and evade accountability to European citizens.

The EU Parliament meddled in Iran's internal affairs, claiming to defend human rights in the Islamic Republic, the lawmakers said, adding its resolution amounted to practical support for terrorism and terrorist groups, the statement read.

According to conclusive documents and undeniable evidence, certain foreign intelligence services have had a "direct and organized connection with the leaders of terrorist groups" and the killing of innocent people on January 8 was carried out with their support, it added.

However, it noted that the Iranians' mass participation in rallies across the country a few days later "clearly demonstrated na-

tional unity and cohesion" and their rejection of riot, chaos, and insecurity.

The Iranian lawmakers emphasized that the mass rallies completely defeated the enemy's plot to disrupt the country's order and security.

They explained that the foreign perpetrators of the riots then resorted to international means of pressure, such as issuing political resolutions and intensifying sanctions, further exposing their hostile nature and goals.

"The European Parliament and the meddlesome European countries bear direct legal and political responsibility for supporting, facilitating, and paving the way for terrorist acts against the Iranian people and cannot evade accountability to the Iranian nation and world public opinion," the lawmakers emphasized.

They said European countries kept silent vis-à-vis Israel's crimes against the Palestinian people and supported a terrorist regime, but now clearly pursue double standards by issuing an anti-Iran resolution and wrongfully accusing the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), which has played a key role in fighting terrorism in



A general view of Iran's Parliament
IRNA

the region.

Late last month, widespread economic hardship compounded by years of Western sanctions sparked peaceful protests by merchants across Tehran and other cities. Iranian authorities initially acknowledged the legitimacy of some demands, but officials said demonstrations were hijacked

by US- and Israeli-backed rioters aiming to incite violence and disorder. Iran's Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs later reported that 3,117 people died during the unrest, including 2,427 civilians and security personnel, noting that many innocents were killed by organized terrorist elements.

Second killing in Minneapolis by US ICE officers sparks uproar

The killing of a second US citizen by federal immigration agents in Minneapolis on Saturday has sparked new protests and impassioned demands by local leaders for the Trump administration to end its operation in the city. Federal agents shot dead Alex Pappas, a 37-year-old ICU nurse, while scuffling with him on an icy roadway, less than three weeks after an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officer shot and killed Renee Good, also 37, in her car, AFP reported.

The Trump administration quickly claimed, as it did after Good's death, that Pappas had intended to harm the federal agents, even as video of the incident appeared to contradict their account.

The Department of Home-

land Security (DHS) pointed to a pistol and ammunition it said was discovered on Pappas. "He was there to perpetuate violence," Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem told a briefing, while White House deputy chief of staff Stephen Miller referred to Pappas as an "assassin," in a post amplified on X by Vice President JD Vance. However, as with Good's death, cell phone footage of the incident raised serious questions about the federal government's description of the incident. Video aired widely by US media, shows Pappas filming agents in the snow-lined street and directing traffic. After an agent shoves a woman protester to the ground on the sidewalk,

Pappas steps in between them and is sprayed in the face by a chemical irritant. The agent then pulls Pappas to the ground and several officers struggle to detain him on the icy roadway. Seconds later, as an officer apparently discovers and pulls a gun from Pappas's pants, agents open fire, also shooting his motionless body several times from a distance. Pappas's parents in a statement circulated by US media called him a "kind-hearted soul" and accused the Trump administration of telling "sickening lies" about their son. Minnesota Governor Tim Walz called the shooting "horrific" and demanded state authorities lead the investigation.

"The federal government cannot be trusted to lead

this investigation. The state will handle it, period," Walz told a news conference.

One Senate Republican on Saturday called for a joint investigation into the shooting.

"The events in Minneapolis are incredibly disturbing. The credibility of ICE and DHS are at stake," Senator Bill Cassidy, a Louisiana Republican, wrote on X.

As the president presses a sweeping campaign to deport undocumented migrants, thousands of ICE agents have been deployed to the Democratic-led city.

Public outrage was also rekindled earlier this week by the detention of a five-year-old boy as federal agents sought to arrest his father.

Iraqi Shia alliance picks Nouri al-Maliki as PM nominee

International Desk

Iraqi former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki is on the verge of a return to power after being nominated as the country's next premier by an alliance of Shia political blocs that hold a majority in parliament.

The Shia Coordination Framework said on Saturday that it had picked al-Maliki, leader of the Islamic Dawa Party, as its nominee for the post based on his "political and administrative experience and his role in managing the state." The bloc said the nomination had been made by majority vote after an in-depth and extensive discussion, naming al-Maliki as the candidate of the framework.

The Coordination Framework reaffirmed its full commitment to the constitutional path, stressing its readiness to work with all national political forces to form a strong and effective government capable of confronting challenges,

delivering services, and safeguarding Iraq's security and unity.

A central figure in Iraq's politics, the 75-year-old first became prime minister in 2006, as the country appeared to be unravelling amid a wave of violence unleashed by the United States-led invasion of 2003.

He stepped down after the Daesh terrorist group seized large parts of the country in 2014, but has remained an influential political player, leading the State of Law coalition.

The politician spent nearly a quarter of a century in exile after campaigning against the governance of former dictator Saddam Hussein, but returned to Iraq in the wake of the 2003 invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein.

The nomination of al-Maliki came amid reports that the United States has threatened Iraqi officials that it could impose financial sanctions targeting the Iraqi state, including



Nouri al-Maliki
AFP

potentially restricting its access to vital oil revenues, if certain political factions were included in the next government, four sources familiar with the matter told Reuters recently. Sources said the US has warned that the inclusion of a group of 58 MPs targeted by Washington would lead to a suspension of diplomatic engagement and halting of dollar transfers.

Iraq, one of the top oil producers in the West Asia region, maintains its oil revenues in a Central Bank account held at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

Nouri al-Maliki, fit ...

He will undoubtedly face significant challenges. Perhaps the most pressing is the concurrent presence of Donald Trump as president, who has made numerous threats against Iraq, including sanctions against Iraqi political figures. Undoubtedly, a portion of his ability to build domestic unity will be linked to his foreign policy. Maintaining a balance in Iraq's relations between Iran and the United States will be crucial in his foreign policy. One key domestic file he will address is the relationship between Baghdad and Erbil. His ties with the Sadr movement, a powerful opposition force that doesn't view Al-Maliki favorably, will also be a challenge. The economy is also a serious challenge for Iraq, facing numerous difficulties. Finally, his relations with Arab countries, particularly those in the Persian Gulf, who have not held a positive view of Al-Maliki in his previous two terms as prime minister, are also a sensitive issue. How Al-Maliki can win over their trust will be vital.

Given his well-established ties to Iran, what implications will Al-Maliki's selection have for Iraq-Iran relations?

Al-Maliki is considered a friend of Iran and a Shia political figure closely aligned with the Islamic Republic. However, it shouldn't be forgotten that he is a politi-

cian who prioritizes Iraq's national interests. Both he and his political party, the Dawa Party, have historically supported the principles of resistance and the Islamic Republic in broader strategic matters. Nevertheless, one thing Al-Maliki will undoubtedly consider during this exceptionally tense and difficult period is creating a balance between the key players and power centers present in Iraq – namely, Tehran and Washington. I don't believe he will seek to disrupt this balance, although there are suspicions about him from his opponents, both in Iraq and abroad. Given the current situation and the Shia Coordination Framework's understanding, Al-Maliki's approach will likely be to create a balance in foreign policy to allow Iraq to navigate this sensitive and tense situation.

How do you think Nouri al-Maliki's premiership will impact relations between Baghdad and Washington? Can Al-Maliki stand firm against pressure to disarm resistance groups and defend Iraq's sovereignty and independence?

I believe that Al-Maliki and the Shia Coordination Framework have reached a general conclusion on this matter – a desire to de-escalate tensions with the United States. The Iraqi government and

political structure have no desire whatsoever to create tensions with Americans. My assessment is that a decision has already been made to lower the level of armament possession by some of these resistance groups and to integrate them into the Iraqi armed forces. This may not happen completely, but I believe that the Iraqis and Al-Maliki's government will take a series of gradual and minimal steps in this regard to appease the Americans and reduce tensions.

Generally, there's a demand among various political factions in Iraq, some social groups, and even religious leaders for weapons to be the exclusive domain of the government. Therefore, I believe that Al-Maliki's government will also consider this matter. The resistance groups in Iraq generally trust Al-Maliki as a figure who has supported them, and this trust can gradually help achieve this goal and reduce the pressure exerted by the Americans. However, Al-Maliki is also a nationalist and powerful Iraqi figure who has always criticized foreign interference in Iraq. He will strive to maintain a balance so that neither the framework of Iraqi sovereignty is compromised nor the country is threatened by the Americans. Still, it is a difficult situation and it remains to be seen how much Al-Maliki will be able to succeed in this case.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



NIGC signs 22 deals with private firms to cut gas consumption, boost efficiency

Economy Desk

The National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) signed 22 contracts with private energy efficiency service providers — known locally as 'Carver Type 2' firms — to reduce and optimize natural gas consumption.

Twenty-two contracts aimed at optimizing gas consumption were signed between 11 provincial gas companies and domestic operator firms. The move marks a major step in leveraging private-sector capabilities to optimize and conserve natural gas consumption across the country, officials said at the signing ceremony, IRNA reported.

"Today, Carver Type 2 contracts were signed in collaboration with the National Iranian Gas Company, and harnessing the capacity of the private sector will open a new path toward gas consumption savings and optimization," said Ahmad Zeraatkar, deputy oil minister for planning. He noted that a six-year effort to implement the national energy consumption optimization plan has finally entered the execution phase following approval by the government. "This initiative — largely focused on gas consumption management — can bring about an effective shift in energy governance," he

added.

Zeraatkar emphasized that the private sector plays a critical role in transforming the energy industry. "The team that has been formed is capable of driving a major transformation, and from now on, processes will be fundamentally different. The new direction fully leverages private-sector capacities for energy savings and optimization."

He also credited NIGC with "round-the-clock efforts" that led to today's agreements and announced plans to operationalize "Carver Type 1" contracts in the near future.

Under the contracts, the operators will work to curb gas consumption in residential, commercial, administrative and agricultural sectors, as well as greenhouses, poultry farms, bakeries, brick kilns and major industries.

According to the report, about 22% of the country's produced energy is wasted daily across power plants, industries, households and agriculture. Based on Article 46, Table 10 of Iran's Seventh Development Plan, 1.285 million barrels of oil equivalent in lost energy must be recovered by the end of the program — equal to roughly 200 million cubic meters of gas per day, or the output capacity of eight phases of the South Pars gas field.



The National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) signs 22 contracts with private energy efficiency service providers — known locally as 'Carver Type 2' firms — to reduce and optimize natural gas consumption on January 25, 2026.

● SHANA

Meanwhile, Saeed Tavakoli, managing director of NIGC, has highlighted recent record-breaking gas demand, noting that household and commercial sectors consumed an unprecedented 737 million cubic meters (mcm) of gas on a recent Thursday — equivalent to 85% of daily network injection. Despite the surge, he said, "no industries or power plants faced shortages or supply disruptions."

At the same event, Hassan Karimi, energy director at the Plan and Budget Organization, praised NIGC for recognizing the innovation and flexibility of the private sector.

Karimi described NIGC as undergoing a governance transformation and organizational maturation, with recent actions building on efforts initiated in prior years. He underscored the pivotal role of Carver companies in this evolution,

noting they pursue two transformative approaches: first, a dedicated focus on energy consumption management and



● SHANA

reduction — an area previously neglected; and second, a paradigm shift in how energy savings are conceptualized.

"The country has traveled a long road in energy conservation and must now move beyond basic consumption management toward genuine energy optimization," Karimi said.

He added that under this model, the Iranian gas company has formally acknowledged the private sector's agility and granted Carver firms considerable

operational freedom — "a level of autonomy typically unattainable within conventional governance structures." Iran is the world's fourth-largest consumer of natural gas, after the United States, Russia, and China, with peak winter demand approaching 900 mcm per day during severe cold spells. The country is also the world's third-largest producer of natural gas, with a daily production capacity of nearly 1 billion cubic meters of unprocessed gas.

Deputy minister: Digital economy suffers \$14m daily losses over Internet outages



Economy Desk

Daily Internet disruptions in Iran are inflicting approximately 14.1 million dollars (2,000 billion tomans) in direct economic losses on the country's digital sector, according to Ehsan Chitsaz, a deputy telecom minister for digital economy.

"Daily Internet outages cause 2,000 billion tomans in damages," Chitsaz said, emphasizing that the losses are not confined to digital businesses alone. Traditional commerce, he noted, has also become heavily reliant on digital tools for essential communications, customer engagement, and operations.

Chitsaz warned that turning emergency measures like Internet filtering into permanent policy undermines their effectiveness during actual crises. "Converting emergency approaches such as filtering into a routine practice eliminates their impact when real emergencies arise," he said. "Continuing this mistaken policy not only forces authorities to resort to complete communication blackouts but also drives people toward alternative tools, rendering future restrictions ineffective — and could ultimately lead to power outages."

The remarks come as Iran's digital economy

struggles to recover from a recent decline. After falling from 4.62% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2021 to 4.02% in 2023, the sector was projected to rebound to around 4.63% by 2025. The digital economy encompasses telecom operators, digital service platforms, and traditional industries upgraded with technologies like artificial intelligence — sectors that depend entirely on stable connectivity.

"Sustainable communications are the core infrastructure of this entire chain," Chitsaz said. "Without it, smart transformation and concepts like artificial intelligence become meaningless."

He highlighted that advertising investments are made based on expected sales, but when the digital chain is severed, businesses require five to six months to return to previous revenue cycles. Given limited cash flow and low re-

silience in the sector, prolonged disruptions are already triggering workforce reductions and causing structural, long-term damage. The consequences extend beyond immediate revenue loss. "The damage isn't limited to fast-turnover businesses," Chitsaz said. "Digital tourism, digital health, and digital advertising face far more complex and severe repercussions." He also cited the erosion of foreign commercial trust, disruptions in foreign exchange rate determination, and increased volatility in the gold market as additional fallout from recurring Internet blackouts.

Access to the global Internet had been fully blocked since January 9 following deadly riots and terrorist acts on the streets. The restrictions were imposed shortly after extensive unrest began on January 8 and persisted for several days in towns and major cities across Iran.

Desalination capacity in southeastern Iran rises by 20,000 m³/day

Economy Desk

Seawater desalination capacity in the southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan has expanded by 20,000 cubic meters per day as part of a national effort to ensure sustainable drinking water supply for over 360,000 residents, a provincial water official said during a field visit to key infrastructure projects.

"Based on planning by the Ministry of Energy, part of the sustainable drinking water supply for Chabahar and Konarak will come from the sea," said Farhad Sargolzaei, managing director of Sistan and Baluchestan Water and Wastewater Company, ISNA reported.

He noted that the national water supply project for the two cities is being implemented in two phases at an accelerated pace. "The project to increase the desalination capacity of Chabahar and Konarak by 20,000 cubic meters per day is seriously underway; fortunately, 7,500 cubic meters of this new capacity have already been commissioned, and efforts are ongoing to complete and operationalize the remaining capacity as soon as possible," he said.

Sargolzaei identified the seawater desalination expansion and the water transfer project from Kahir Dam among the most critical large-scale water supply initiatives currently under implementation by the Ministry of Energy.



● ISNA

Upon full completion, desalination capacity in the region is expected to reach 60,000 cubic meters per day, significantly improving water security for Chabahar and Konarak. Iran, with its predominantly semi-arid and arid climate, faces water stress and crisis, and the supply of drinking water has now become one of the biggest challenges in many provinces, and cities. The country has embarked on large-scale transfers of desalinated water from the Sea of Oman and the Persian Gulf to its eastern and southern regions. The nationwide program, launched in 2021, includes the construction of five desalinated seawater transfer lines designed to help ease water shortages.

Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi said in November that the government is accelerating work on a large-scale seawater desalination program with a capacity of two billion cubic meters, describing the effort as essential to coping with one of the country's harshest multi-year droughts.

Iran, Turkey set to negotiate joint free trade zone agreement

Economy Desk

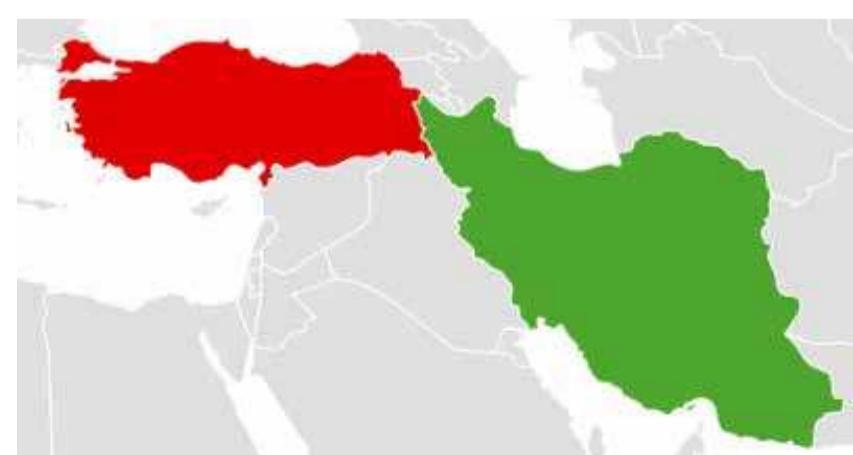
Iran's High Council of Free Trade Zones Secretariat announced on Sunday that it had been authorized to begin negotiations with Turkey on a bilateral agreement to establish a joint free trade zone, following formal approval by the Cabinet.

"In accordance with a decision by the Cabinet, permission to negotiate the agreement on establishing a joint free trade zone between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Turkey

has been issued," the secretariat said in a statement cited by Mehr news agency. The government approved the measure on January 14, authorizing the Secretariat of the High Council of Free Trade and Special Economic Zones to conduct negotiations on the proposed agreement. The decision was formally communicated by the first vice president on January 19. Under the directive, the secretariat is permitted to carry out negotiations solely on the draft agreement — up to the point of final ratification — in co-

ordination with and in the presence of representatives from the presidential legal vice presidency (International Affairs) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

"The agreement aims to enhance economic cooperation, boost trade exchanges, facilitate the transit of goods and passengers, generate employment opportunities, stimulate border regions, and fully uphold the principles of national sovereignty and territorial integrity of both countries," the secretariat said.



NATO's shadow

Can Europe free itself from security dependence on United States?



By Parham
Pourramezan
Political science
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ANALYSIS
EXCLUSIVE

For over seven decades, Europe's security architecture has been shaped under the heavy and extensive shadow of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the decisive power of the United States. From the Cold War era to the Balkan conflicts and post-9/11 missions, Washington has been not only the primary patron but often the field commander of the continent's security. This dependency-based relationship brought unprecedented stability and protection to Western Europe, but it simultaneously severely restricted its strategic choice and room for independent action. Today, this longstanding dependence has become one of Europe's greatest geopolitical questions: Can, or should, a continent with such civilizational heritage and economic capacity take full control of its own security destiny?

This fundamental question is no longer an academic debate but has been propelled into the realm of action under the pressure of a new and harsh reality. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, while strengthening NATO solidarity, sounded a serious alarm for Europeans; a warning revealing how fragile their security is and how dependent it remains on the changing will and priorities of Washington. Fluctuations in US policy from Trump's "America First" era to Biden's increasing focus on competition with China, coupled with uncertainty about the continuity of American commitments in the future, have compelled Europe to consider "strategic autonomy" and strengthening NATO's European pillar with unprecedented urgency. But does this ambition align with complex practical obstacles such as budgetary gaps, disparities in military capabilities, and the divergent inclinations of the EU's 27 member states? This analysis argues that the answer to this question will shape not only the future of the continent's security but also the global balance of power.

In the decades following World War II, Europe built its security



Soldiers of the Eurocorps hold the European flag during a ceremony in front of the European Parliament in Strasbourg, June 30, 2014.
JEAN-MARC LOOS/REUTERS

pillar on NATO and US strategic support. This deep dependence guaranteed the continent's security during the Cold War and continued as a stabilizing umbrella thereafter. However, recent geopolitical shifts, including the reorientation of US priorities towards competition with China, fluctuations in allied commitments under different Washington administrations, and the shock of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, have raised serious questions about the sustainability of this security model. The question of whether Europe can achieve greater security autonomy is now at the heart of strategic debates. On the path to security autonomy, Europe faces major obstacles. The first challenge is the deficit in critical military capabilities that have been carried by the US for decades; ranging from missile defense systems and strategic logistics to intelligence and nuclear capabilities. Second is the issue of coordination and consensus among the EU's 27 members with sometimes conflicting interests, which can subject any joint initiative to delay and compromise. Third is the heavy financial burden of building independent security structures, while many European countries face budgetary constraints. Nevertheless, steps such as NATO's "European pillar," the "Strategic Transportation" plan for troop movement, or the "Strategic Compass" initiative indicate a will to enhance capacity. This analysis posits the following potential scenarios for this divergence:

Scenario 1: Gradual consolidation of strategic self-reliance

In this scenario, Europe steadily and continuously strengthens joint defense initiatives like the "Strategic Compass" and NATO's "European pillar." Military investments increase, defense industry coordination improves, and joint command structures are enhanced. However, this process does not signify replacing NATO; instead, Europe becomes a "more capable partner" within the transatlantic security umbrella. The US, while welcoming a reduced burden of responsibil-

ity in Eastern Europe, maintains its role as the ultimate guarantor of the continent's security. This path represents the most balanced and least costly route for Europe but requires maintaining European solidarity and sustained US commitment despite changes in administration.

values, severely threatens global stability, and creates an ideal environment for exploitation by powers like Russia.

Scenario 4: NATO renaissance and the consolidation of dependence

A significantly more aggressive and extensive move by Russia (e.g., an attack on a NATO member country) or the emergence of another existential common crisis could lead to a revival and consolidation of NATO. In this case, a shared sense of urgency overshadows internal disagreements, and Europeans prefer once again to rally fully under US leadership and protection. European defense investments would focus more on the agenda set by NATO, and movements for security autonomy would be marginalized. This scenario reinforces the traditional dependency and postpones any significant effort towards European strategic autonomy for decades to come.

In conclusion, a complete break from security dependence on the United States appears unrealistic in the short and even medium term. However, moving towards "self-reliance within the alliance" is an inescapable necessity. Internal pressures in the US to reduce foreign commitments, the rise of China as a systemic rival capturing Washington's attention, and the persistent threat from Russia compel Europe to assume a greater share of its own security. The likely outcome of this process will be a Europe that remains under NATO's shadow but has thinned that shadow and made its own role more prominent. The future of the continent's security will be determined not by a rupture from America, but by a redefined and more mature version of this historically asymmetric partnership.



Europe's security architecture has been shaped under the heavy shadow of NATO and the United States for over seven decades. Today, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has highlighted the fragility of this dependence, compelling Europe to consider 'strategic autonomy' and strengthening NATO's European pillar with unprecedented urgency.



Can a collision between USA, Europe be avoided?



By Robert Ellis
International Advisor at RIEAS in Athens

If the US president was Moscow's Manchurian candidate, he could not do better—he has just imposed punitive tariffs on the European countries that oppose his Greenland takeover bid. And Donald Trump has achieved what people thought impossible—to unite Europe and unite the kingdom of Denmark.

At the same time, he has done Europe an inestimable service. Both in his first term of office and last year Trump made plain to Europe they must pay their share of the defense burden. At the NATO summit in The Hague last June America's NATO allies committed to spending five percent of GDP on defense, and it is clearly Russia's invasion of Ukraine that has woken Europe from its lethargy. Former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger is credited with saying, "Who do I call if

I want to speak to Europe?", but now the contours of a defense structure are emerging. EU Commission president Ursula von der Leyen and her vice-president Kaja Kallas, who is in charge of foreign affairs and security, play a prominent role. It was Kallas who in March last year presented Readiness 2030, Europe's plan to allocate up to €800 billion on defense spending. Also, in March the UK and France launched a plan to establish a "coalition of the willing" to provide support for a peace plan for Ukraine.

The coalition, which consists of 35 countries, is behind the 20-point peace plan in response to the 28-point plan concocted by US envoy Steve Witkoff and Russian envoy Kirill Dmitriev. There is a great deal of tension between the USA and Europe, which was accentuated by Vice President JD Vance's address at the Munich Security Conference in February last year. Here he raised the issue of the challenge from mass migration and lectured on democratic values.

NATO and thus the security that has been established since the end of the Second World War". Nevertheless, Trump forges ahead under the mantra of "national security", although there is the suspicion this is a fig leaf for a real estate deal. As his new envoy for Greenland, Louisiana governor Jeff Landry admitted, "Our president is a business president." For this reason, US secretary of state Marco Rubio agreed to meet with the Danish and Greenland foreign ministers, but

at the last minute the venue was changed to the White House with JD Vance in charge.

There was no readout of the meeting or a joint press conference, so what we have learned is from the press conference with the Danish and Greenland ministers and an interview on Fox News with Danish foreign minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen.

At the press conference, Rasmussen stated the aim was to find a joint way forward to increase Arctic security. Also, that it was agreed to form a high-level working group with this aim. Both here and on Fox News Rasmussen emphasized that the territorial integrity of the kingdom of Denmark and the Greenlandic people's right to self-determination must be respected.

Greenland's prime minister Jens-Frederik Nielsen has also asserted that green land does not want to be owned or governed by

the USA. If they have to choose here and now, they choose Denmark, NATO and the EU.

Therefore, it caused consternation when the White House's press secretary Karoline Leavitt stated that the two sides agreed to establish a working group to continue to have technical talks on the acquisition of Greenland. Consequently, there have been mass protests in Nuuk, in Copenhagen and other Danish cities, making common cause against US demands.

Several European NATO countries have also dispatched token forces to Greenland in support. Trump's angry response does not enjoy popular support in the USA, where YouGov 86 percent are opposed to the use of military force to take control of Greenland. In Denmark there has been a call to cancel the annual celebration of US independence on July 4.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who

earlier was Denmark's prime minister and NATO's secretary general, has told the Financial Times Trump uses Greenland as "a weapon of mass distraction" from the real threats such as Russia's war in Ukraine. Instead, he suggests Denmark should present Trump with three concrete proposals: A revision of the 1951 defense agreement, an investment agreement, and a compact to prevent Russian and Chinese influence.

Danish Defense Minister Troels Lund Poulsen and Greenland's foreign minister Vivian Motzfeldt have met with NATO secretary general Mark Rutte and proposed a NATO mission in Greenland and the Arctic, but whether this is acceptable to "Daddy" remains to be seen.

This article first appeared on the Research Institute for European and American Studies (RIEAS).



• ALAMY

Trump, EU escalate tariff war as US-European conflict mounts over Greenland



By Alex Lantier
Researcher

Major political crises inevitably produce turning points in which essential conflicts and issues, long hidden, emerge. The Trump administration's conflict with the European imperialist powers over control of Greenland is reaching this point.

For over a decade, a period that included Trump's first term in office and his launching of a global trade war in his second, European powers have reacted to criticism from Washington by boosting their military power. They slashed social spending by hundreds of billions of euros, impoverishing workers to pour funds into European armies and the Ukraine-Russia war. European officials called to improve relations with the United States by ensuring Europe did a fair share of spending on the NATO alliance.

Trump's demands for a US takeover of Greenland from its status as an autonomous region of Denmark, after his illegal January 3 invasion of Venezuela to kidnap President Nicolas Maduro, and his threats to bomb Iran for regime change, are shattering this narrative. It is ever clearer that US-European relations are teetering on the brink of collapse, amid a deepening trade war that threatens potentially violent conflict between the NATO powers.

Last week, as Trump demanded US control over Greenland, supposedly to protect its strategic locations and minerals from Russia and China, seven European countries (Finland, France, Germany, Norway, the Netherlands, Sweden, the UK) sent a few dozen soldiers to the island. The operation posed no meaningful threat to the United States and was accompanied by pledges of loyalty to "Euro-Atlantic security" and NATO. However, the operation did not reassure, but rather enraged the US president, who is seeking not an alliance, but world hegemony.

On Saturday, Trump denounced the deployment on his Truth Social network, stating: "This is a very dangerous situation for the Safety, Security, and Survival of

our Planet. These Countries, who are playing this very dangerous game, have put a level of risk in play that is not tenable or sustainable."

Trump threatened to impose further tariffs on European countries opposing the sale of Greenland to Washington, which would rise from 10 to 25 percent if no deal was reached. Coming atop existing 10 percent tariffs on British and 15 percent tariffs on EU products, this could collapse trade between America and Europe, the world's two largest trade blocs, with devastating implications for the global economy.

Trump's threats provoked consternation and denunciations in European ruling circles. The seven governments who had participated in the deployment issued a joint statement with Denmark, defending their operation and threatening Trump with a collapse in US-European relations.

"As members of NATO, we are committed to strengthening Arctic security as a shared transatlantic interest. The pre-coordinated Danish exercise 'Arctic Endurance' conducted with Allies, responds to this necessity. It poses no threat to anyone," it said, adding: "Tariff threats undermine transatlantic relations and risk a dangerous downward spiral. We will continue to stand united and coordinated in our response."

Despite London's "special relationship" with Washington and its non-EU status since Brexit, UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer issued his own statement criticizing Trump. "Applying tariffs on allies for pursuing the collective security of NATO allies is completely wrong," he said. "Our position on Greenland is very clear: it is part of the Kingdom of Denmark and its future is a matter for the Greenlanders and the Danes."

EU officials took several emergency decisions. The European Parliament suspended negotiations on a planned EU-US trade deal. A meeting of European ambassadors last night in Brussels imposed a pre-planned package of €93 billion in retaliatory tariffs on US products. European Council President Antonio Cos-

ta announced an emergency EU summit at the end of the week to discuss further measures.

"Trump will not get duty-free transit of his American products into the European market," said Manfred Weber, the president of the right-wing European People's Party coalition in the European Parliament. Boasting that he had put the US-EU trade deal "on ice," Weber added: "Going forward, we are not powerless." Weber added that Berlin could support French President Emmanuel Macron's call to invoke the EU's Anti-Coercion Instrument (ACI) against the United States. "All options are on the table. That is a possibility we have," he said. The ACI, or "trade bazooka," lets the EU ban US firms from European government contracts (including defense), cut payments to US financial and tech firms for their services in Europe, and suspend intellectual property payments to US companies.

A mortal crisis of the global capitalist system is underway, as the traditions and institutions that previously determined economic and military relations between major capitalist powers for decades collapse. Workers internationally face the danger of trade and financial crises erupting from a renewed tariff war. Moreover,

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Tariff threats undermine transatlantic relations and risk a dangerous downward spiral.

▼

Military vessel HDMS Knud Rasmussen of the Royal Danish Navy patrols near Nuuk, Greenland, on January 15, 2026.

• EVGENIY MALOLETKA/AP

given Washington's ever more aggressive foreign policy and Europe's accelerating rearmament, this could escalate into military conflict between the major NATO powers.

Washington is far better armed than its European "allies" and can exploit the European powers' economically suicidal foreign policy. They enthusiastically joined the Biden administration's stoking of war with Russia in Ukraine in 2022. They thus cut off their access to Russian and Eurasian energy and raw materials and made themselves dependent on more expensive imports of US energy, even as Trump waged trade war against them.

However, the European imperialists are also well aware of key vulnerabilities of US imperialism: its industrial weakness; the indebtedness of the US government, which issues trillions of dollars in US Treasury debt; and its reliance on the US dollar's global role to prop up its stock market.

Indeed, while Beijing has shifted out of the dollar and steadily cut its holdings of US Treasury debt, Europe kept adding to its Treasury holdings. Financial entities in Europe hold over \$3 trillion in US Treasury debt, led by Britain (\$865 billion), Belgium (\$466 billion), Luxembourg (\$421 billion), France

(\$376 billion) and Ireland (\$340 billion). They thus are in the absurd situation of financing a government waging trade war against them and threatening to seize their territory.

Last year, however, key European banks like HSBC, Standard Chartered and BNP Paribas joined China's Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS), which lets them finance international trade via currency swaps, thereby evading the SWIFT system and the US dollar. There were also growing rumors of European threats to retaliate against Trump by dumping the dollar so as to trigger a sovereign debt crisis and a financial crash in the United States. In December, in an article titled, "Is Europe ready to pull the trigger?", India's Economic Times reported: "European leadership has begun weighing what some describe as a 'nuclear option': the mass liquidation of US Treasury securities held by European governments." Britain's Express daily explained this "nuclear option" as follows:

European leaders are considering adopting extreme countermeasures ... designed to unleash economic chaos in the US. The alleged plan involves dumping trillions in US government debt owned by European states. A rapid sell off would likely cause a crash in the value of the US dollar, create a liquidity crisis across the banking system and cause a huge spike in borrowing costs. It would also lock the American financial sector into a paralysis more severe than the 2008 crisis. Neither Trump's plans for US global hegemony and conquest nor European imperialist plans for rearmament and global financial war offer anything to the working class, however. On both sides of the Atlantic, governments are pressing ahead with militarism, social austerity and repression in defiance of mass working class opposition. The decisive question is and remains unifying the working class in all the NATO countries and internationally in an international struggle against imperialist war and the capitalist system.



The article first published at the World Socialist Web Site.

Aqapour cautions Iran against complacency at Futsal Asian Cup

Sports Desk

Asian Futsal Player of the Year Salar Aqapour has warned his Iranian teammates not to underestimate any opponent as they prepare to defend their title at the upcoming AFC Futsal Asian Cup, which kicks off in Jakarta, Indonesia, on Tuesday.

Iran begins its quest for a record-extending 14th Asian crown against Malaysia in Group D on Wednesday, before facing Saudi Arabia two days later at the Jakarta International Velodrome.

Vahid Shamsaei's team will conclude the group stage against Afghanistan – coached by Iranian Majid Mortezaei – on Sunday. This is a repeat of their group encounter in the 2024 edition, which Iran narrowly won 3-1.

The top two teams from each group will advance to the quarterfinals.

Iran has long been the dominant force in Asia's premier futsal event, suffering only four defeats in 105 matches across the previous 17 editions. Two of those losses came in finals against Japan – the only nation besides Iran to

have lifted the Asian trophy. However, with futsal rapidly developing across the continent in recent years, Aqapour believes Iran must navigate a series of tricky tests against emerging Asian powers.

"We saw how impressively Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia performed at the Islamic Solidarity Games [last November] Malaysia also had a decent run in the Asian Cup qualifiers. Asian futsal has progressed significantly in recent years, and we will have to work hard to defend our title," Aqapour told the Tasnim News Agency.

Afghanistan, which reached the last 16 in its World Cup debut in 2024, held Iran to a 2-2 draw at the Islamic Solidarity Games (ISG) in Riyadh. Saudi Arabia also impressed at the event on home soil, causing African powerhouse Morocco considerable trouble in the semifinals before falling 6-3 after extra time. "All teams will be highly motivated and will play to their full capacity when facing Iran at the Asian Cup, but we are a cut above. Iran is a global futsal

power, as we demonstrated with our commanding 5-0 victory over Morocco in the ISG final," Aqapour added. "The draw against Afghanistan in Riyadh was simply an anomaly. They are a respectable team, but I'm confident that result will not be repeated," said the left winger, who was part of the team that defeated Thailand in the previous final.

Aqapour remained unfazed by the prospect of meeting one of the tournament favorites in the quarterfinals, stating: "We will likely play Japan or Uzbekistan, though it doesn't really matter which team we face in the knockout stages. Whether it's in the quarterfinals or later, God willing, we will win and advance." Addressing the high expectations placed on him as the reigning Asian Player of the Year, Aqapour said: "Other players in the Iranian squad have won this award before me. The achievement was the result of collective work, and I received this prestigious prize on behalf of all my teammates. We have three award winners on the roster, and I hope our teamwork will bring success to



Salar Aqapour celebrates with the Iranian flag after the futsal final victory over Morocco at the Islamic Solidarity Games in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on November 11, 2025.

FFIRI

Iran at the Asian Cup." Moslem Oladqobad was named the 2022 Asian Player of the Year, with prolific pivot Saeid Ahmadabasi winning the prize the following year.

"All players have worked hard and remained motivated from the start of the training camp through the final squad selection. The team is a blend of young talents and experienced

players.

"We have had a proper training camp. We played Russia in a couple of friendlies and competed in the Islamic Solidarity Games, which laid the groundwork

for Asian Cup success. We were disappointed, however, that our friendly against Iraq was cancelled, as it disrupted the coaching staff's preparations for the tournament."

Persepolis signs Hungarian fullback Gera; Sepahan seals Mohebbi loan

Sports Desk



Hungarian fullback Dániel Gera is the second winter signing for Persepolis following Uzbekistan international striker Igor Sergeev.

amigeleken.hu

Persian Gulf Pro League club Persepolis has completed the signing of Hungarian fullback Dániel Gera from Diósgyőr VTK in Hungary's top flight, the Nemzeti Bajnokság I. The season-and-a-half-long contract ends the Tehran Reds' search for a replacement for former PSG and Tottenham fullback Serge Aurier on the right side of the defense, after the high-profile Ivorian parted ways with the club last month.

Aurier joined Persepolis with high expectations last summer, but an injury-hit campaign limited him to only five appearances in the first half of the ongoing domestic league season, with 19-year-old Yaqoub Barajeh serving as the first-

choice right-back. Gera, 30, recorded one goal and two assists in 17 games for Diósgyőr in the Hungarian league and cup this season. A former Hungarian U21 international, Gera has four senior caps to his name, with his last appearance coming in a 1-1 draw against Germany in the UEFA Nations League in November 2024. His move marks the second winter signing for Persepolis and Brazilian head coach Osmar Loss Vieira, following Uzbekistan international striker Igor Sergeev. Sergeev scored in his second outing to help the Reds beat Sepahan 2-1 in the so-called 'Iranian Clásico' on Friday, a result that saw Persepolis leapfrog its familiar foe to take top spot in the table.

Persepolis is reportedly on the verge of signing Iranian U23 defender Farzin Mo'amelehgari from Shams Azar, as Osmar seeks to provide competition for Milad Mohammadi in the left-back position.

Sepahan completes Mohebbi move

Meanwhile, Sepahan has signed Mohammad-Mahdi Mohebbi on loan from Emirati club Ittihad Kalba until the end of the season. Mohebbi scored nine goals and provided 10 assists in 37 appearances across all competitions for Sepahan last season before departing for the United Arab Emirates in August. That successful campaign earned the 25-year-old his international debut in a dead rubber against Qatar in the World Cup qualifiers

in June. He later netted his first goal and provided an assist for Team Melli in a 3-0 victory over North Korea.

Mohebbi, however, struggled to make an impact in the UAE's ADNOC Pro League, failing to register a goal or assist in nine appearances while also missing seven games due to injury and suspension.

The left-footed winger last featured in Kalba's 3-1 away defeat to Sharjah FC last week, where he was substituted at halftime. The deal provides a major boost for Sepahan head coach Moharram Navidkia, who must cope without top scorer Mohammad Askari for the rest of the season. The young striker suffered a torn ligament while on duty with Iran at the U23 Asian Cup earlier this month.

Karate One-Premier League 2026

Asgari settles for bronze as Iranians disappoint in Istanbul

Sports Desk

Bahman Asgari was the sole Iranian karateka to claim a medal at the latest Karate One-Premier League event, as the country endured a below-par campaign in Istanbul, Turkey.

The former world champion recovered from a semifinal setback against home favorite Omer Faruk Yurur to beat Ukraine's Heorhii Pitsul 6-0 in the men's kumite -75kg third-place bout, securing a joint-bronze alongside Ja-

pan's Yusei Sakiyama. In the men's -60kg class, Abolfazl Hamdamjou suffered defeats against Chile's Ruiz Enrique Villalon (2-0) and Italy's Angelo Crescenzo (6-1), sandwiching an 8-2 victory over Kuwait's Abdalhadi Alajmi. Finishing as runner-up in Pool 3, he missed out on a place in the knockout phase.

Reigning world bronze medalist Saleh Abazari also failed to progress in the men's +84kg event. Abazari defeated Dutch karateka Is-

sam Najdi (3-1) and Japan's Yuta Mori (4-3) but lost 5-4 to Kazakhstan's Dias Anarbekov in the pool phase. Mahmoud Nemati was the other Iranian in the +84kg category, exiting in the pools after a 3-0 setback against neutral athlete Ivan Kudzinai of Belarus.

Nemati opened his campaign with a 1-0 win over Russian Kirill Kovalev – also competing under the WKF flag – and later defeated Poland's Pawel Kiryluk on criteria (1-1), ultimately fin-

ishing second in Pool 7. In the women's individual kata, Iranian Fatemeh Sadeghi defeated Portugal's Rita Marques (6-1) and Egypt's Jana Raafat (7-0) before a 5-2 loss to Italy's Carola Casale ended her hopes of a quarterfinal spot.

Iran's Bahman Asgari won the men's kumite -75kg bronze medal at the latest Karate One-Premier League event in Istanbul, Turkey.

ISNA



Eyvanekey; historical gateway between ancient dynasties, modern Semnan

Iranica Desk

Eyvanekey is a city in Semnan Province, located approximately 70 kilometers from Tehran. The word Eyvanekey is composed of two parts: "Eyvan" is a term derived from the Pahlavi language, meaning palace or castle, and "Key" signifies "king." It can be concluded that Eyvanekey was once the seat of government, a command center, and the residence of kings and commanders — similar to the Arch of Ctesiphon in Mesopotamia, Ivan-e Karkheh in Khuzestan, and Ivan-e Khosrow in Kermanshah, all attributed to the Kayanian or Pishdadian dynasties.

The prehistoric mounds and sites in Eyvanekey indicate that human habitation there dates back thousands of years, although this requires more detailed investigation, according to chtn.ir.

Based on the collection of evidence, clues, and ancient mounds around the area, it can be deduced that the ancient city of Eyvanekey was located in a different place than its current site. In this area, there are several forts, shrines (Imamzadehs), and a caravanserai, all of which likely formed parts of a relatively large city. Many of the city's elders and researchers emphasize that Chel Darreh was the ancient location of Eyvanekey, which was destroyed by an earthquake. It is probable that life continued there until the late Safavid period, when devastating earthquakes destroyed the city and the remaining population relocated to the new site. Consequently, the modern city of Eyvanekey likely



took shape from the late Safavid period onward, and its traditional architecture and old alleys date from after that period.

Caravanserais

Located approximately 80 meters east of Haj Nabi Mosque, Haj Esmail Dadgar Caravanserai featured various chambers and camel stables and is registered on the National Heritage List. Amiri Caravanserai is another famous structure, built entirely of adobe (sun-dried mud brick) and cob. The caravanserai had two floors, with chambers facing the courtyard and stables located on its southern side. Travelers' chambers were situated on the second floor, while the first-floor chambers were likely designated for storing merchandise. This site is also registered on the National Heritage List.

Sanaei Primary School

In the center of Eyvanekey stands the building of a school named Sanaei Primary School.

It was established in 1949 CE by Fathollah Sanaei and donated to the Ministry of Education. This school is the oldest center of formal education in Eyvanekey, where the city's earliest educated individuals completed their elementary education. This historical site is registered on the National Heritage List.

Water mills

One of the rare and remarkable phenomena of Eyvanekey is the existence of dozens of water mills found in various parts of the area, especially around the city. This high number of mills was not intended to meet the flour needs of local residents alone; rather, the flour they produced was either transported to other regions or used to supply the numerous caravans and travelers along the historic route from Rey to Khorasan.

Traditional brick kiln

This kiln was used to supply the bricks needed for the con-



chtin.ir



struction of an ancient bridge in Eyvanekey. Afterward, the kiln remained operational for many years before gradually falling into disuse. The kiln is over a hundred years old and was in use until approximately 40 or 50 years ago. This historical site was registered on the National Heritage List in 2008.

Ice house

The structure of the ice house is circular, with a diameter of 11 meters, and features a single entrance approximately one meter wide on its northern side. The building dates back to the early Qajar period and was registered on the National Heritage List in 2008.

Kafar Castle

Access to the Kafar Castle was possible via the eastern and western valleys, while its northern and southern sections are impassable. Pottery fragments recovered from the surface and surrounding areas of Kafar Castle indicate that it was constructed approximately in the 12th or 13th century CE and remained in use until the 16th century CE. It was likely a refuge-type fortress, serving as a stronghold for opponents of ruling powers. This site was registered on the National Heritage List in 2008.

Chehel Dokhtaran Mountain

Located in the eastern part of Kark village, approximately two kilometers from the Imamzadeh Mir Mohammad shrine, stands Chehel Dokhtaran Mountain. Based on pottery samples found at the site, its history can be dated back to at least the early historical period. This site was registered on the National Heritage List in 2008.

Discover living history of Kharg Island



vjc

Iranica Desk

Kharg is a small island on the vast expanse of the Persian Gulf, yet it occupies a grand and enduring place in Iran's historical narrative. Long before evolving into the nation's pulsating heart of energy, this storied land has breathed within the political, economic, and cultural transformations that have shaped the region across centuries. "Kharg Cultural Week" and Kharg Day, observed annually on December 5, offer a meaningful opportunity to pause and reflect—to revisit and celebrate an identity forged over time, one that remains profoundly alive and dynamically vibrant. The history of Kharg Island begins long before the dawn of the oil era. Archaeological evidence,

including ancient cemeteries, remnants of stone churches, and traces of early settlements, attests that Kharg has served as a crossroads of cultures and a hub along vital trade routes since antiquity. Throughout successive epochs, the island functioned as an essential station for sailors, merchants, and even religious missionaries, its name faithfully recorded in numerous travelogues and historical documents, according to chtn.ir.

Indeed, Kharg was never merely a geographical point but rather a strategic and indispensable node within the Persian Gulf's extensive network of communication and exchange. From the era of colonial ambitions and foreign presence in the Persian Gulf to the turbulent years of the Iran-Iraq War,

Kharg Island has persistently stood on the front lines. The island was repeatedly subjected to threat and attack, yet each time it emerged more resilient and steadfast. During the war, Kharg was not only a critical oil terminal but also a powerful symbol of the nation's economic resistance — a place where Iran's vital oil exports defied relentless bombings and continued unabated.

With the arrival and expansion of the oil industry, Kharg entered a transformative new chapter in its historical journey. The development of modern infrastructure, the establishment of the Petroleum University of Technology, and the influx of skilled professionals and workers from across the nation diversified and energized Kharg's

social fabric. In this process, Kharg evolved into a grand school — a school of hard work, specialized expertise, unwavering discipline, and profound responsibility.

Within this industrial landscape, an entire generation emerged which came to view Kharg Island not merely as a workplace but as a cherished second home — a generation that learned to harmonize knowledge, tireless effort, and deep-seated dedication.

That Kharg stands proudly today is a testament to its people, who have patiently and nobly carried the weight of history on their shoulders. These are individuals who, despite harsh climatic conditions, limited natural resources, and considerable occupational pressures, have

tenaciously preserved a culture of empathy, solidarity, and communal living.

Today, Kharg Island stands at a pivotal intersection of a glorious past and a responsible future. Preserving its rich historical heritage, strengthening its distinct cultural identity, and prioritizing thoughtful, sustainable development are urgent necessities that must not be overshadowed by the island's paramount economic role. Kharg Day is far more than a mere date on the calendar — it is a poignant reminder of a collective responsibility to safeguard the history, the people, and the future of this remarkable island. Kharg is an island that deserves to be seen in its full depth and dimension — not only as an indispensable oil terminal but as

a living, breathing narrative of Iran's enduring history and resilient spirit.

To complete the picture of Kharg, one must not overlook its climate. The warm, turquoise waters of the Persian Gulf, paired with a clear blue sky and gentle island breezes, create tranquil moments for residents and visitors alike. Summers are hot and dry, with relatively cool coastal nights, while winters are humid and mild, with occasional winds and low rainfall. Kharg's geographical position, gently orbiting between deep waters and low-lying lands, offers a dynamic blue-and-earthly landscape. Alongside its industry, life here harmonizes with nature in a sustainable, enduring balance.

Widespread library damage across Iran inflicts cultural loss

Arts & Culture Desk

Over 50 public libraries across Iran sustained damage in recent unrest that began in January 8, with several rendered completely inoperable, according to Azadeh Nazarboland, Secretary-General of the National Library and Archives of Iran. The incidents, which have targeted vital cultural institutions, have raised concerns about the long-term impact on literacy and access to knowledge, particularly for vulnerable populations, IRNA reported.

The destruction represents a significant setback for Iran's cultural infrastructure, impacting not only physical buildings but also the crucial role libraries play in fostering intellectual discourse and community engagement.

Experts warn that the loss of these resources will disproportionately affect children, adolescents, and those who rely on libraries as safe havens for learning and cultural enrichment.

The most devastating incident occurred at the Mohammadieh Public Library in Borujen, Chahmeh and Bakhtiari Province. This venerable institution, bequeathed as a cultural endowment over five decades ago in 1970 by the grandson of Ayatollah Seyed Abolhasan Isfahani, housed a priceless collection of over 12,000 volumes, including rare manuscripts, stone prints, encyclopedias, and authoritative Arabic and Persian dictionaries. Notably, the library also contained a curated selection of significant works from Sunni Islamic scholarly centers in Lebanon

(Beirut), Egypt (Cairo), Iraq (Najaf and Baghdad).

Tragically, during the disturbances, the manuscript section, publications, children's resources, and educational materials were completely consumed by fire.

Further damage was reported at the Ferdowsi Public Library in Sureshjan, Chahmeh and Bakhtiari Province, a popular hub with 30,000 books and 700 active members.

The Imam Hassan Mojtaba (PBUH) Public Library in the underprivileged Zarneh district of Ilam, Ilam Province, which served as the sole cultural center for the region, was also entirely destroyed by fire, along with its 17,000 volumes and 400 members.

In Yazd Province, the Ayatollah A'rafi Public Library in Maybod



suffered a fire, resulting in the loss of over 7,000 books, primarily educational resources intended for students. Nazarboland emphasized the breadth of the damage, encompassing arson, vandalism, theft of equipment, and severe structural and resource degradation.

The National Library and Archives of Iran is currently assessing the extent of the losses and formulating plans for the swift reconstruction of these vital cultural centers, aiming to restore them as spaces for intellectual exchange and community cohesion.

Cinema Organization of Iran chief calls for deeper research integration amid AI advancements

Arts & Culture Desk

Chairman of Cinema Organization of Iran Raed Faridzadeh stressed the critical role of research in Iranian cinema, particularly in light of rapidly evolving artificial intelligence technologies.

Speaking at the closing ceremony of the 8th Annual Iranian Cinema Research Awards on January 25, Faridzadeh asserted that research is not merely an option but a "fundamental condition" for thoughtful filmmaking, IRNA reported. The event, held in Tehran, highlighted the growing need for Iranian cinema to engage with interdisciplinary fields, including religious studies, philosophy, and media studies, to unlock deeper meaning within visual narratives.

Faridzadeh cautioned against a passive acceptance of AI, suggesting that the industry risks becoming "a product of circumstances" rather than harnessing technology as a tool.

He stressed the necessity



Chairman of Cinema Organization of Iran Raed Faridzadeh addresses the audience during the closing ceremony of the 8th Annual Iranian Cinema Research Awards in Tehran on January 25, 2026.

IRNA

of understanding the "nature" of this new technological landscape.

The chairman's remarks come as Iranian filmmakers grapple with the potential impact of AI on creative processes and distribution models. Integrating rigorous research, he argued, elevates cinema beyond conventional boundaries, fostering a richer understanding of its function and impact. Without it, he warned, the medium risks "stuttering" and losing its expressive power.

Faridzadeh acknowledged a historical disconnect be-

tween research and practical application within the Iranian film industry.

He expressed hope that recent foundational research conducted by the organization's Studies and Technology Development Department will facilitate a closer alignment between theory and policy.

The awards ceremony saw the evaluation of 109 works across four categories: Books (authored and translated), scientific articles, completed research projects, and master's and doctoral theses.

Alireza Esmaeili, Secre-

tary of the 8th Annual Iranian Cinema Research Awards, emphasized the importance of strengthening ties between academia and the professional film community to enhance the quality of Iranian productions.

He noted the organization's efforts to foster collaboration through workshops and consultations with university film departments. The event also included a tribute to prominent Iranian artists who passed away in the previous year, including Saeed Mozaffari, Hadi Marzban, Saeid Piroozi, Reza Rooygari, Nasser Taghvai, and Bahram Beyzaie, with particular recognition given to Beyzaie's extensive research background.

Oman, Iran discuss enhanced cinematic cooperation

Arts & Culture Desk

Head of the Omani Film Organization Yaqoub Al-Khanjari, met with Jalal Ghafari Qadir, secretary of the 19th International Resistance Film Festival, in Tehran on January 25, to discuss bolstering cinematic collaboration between the two nations.

The meeting underscored a shared commitment to promoting films with themes of resilience and freedom, Ana News Agency reported.

The festival, increasingly recognized as a pivotal platform for showcasing films addressing pressing regional and global issues, has gained considerable traction within the Middle East and beyond, according to Al-Khanjari.

Its focus on narratives reflecting the struggles of marginalized communities, particularly those stemming from the conflicts in Palestine and Gaza, has resonated strongly with audiences and filmmakers alike.

The festival's recent iterations have mirrored the evolving geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, amplifying the voices of those impacted by oppression.

Al-Khanjari lauded the festival's ability to serve as a conduit for conveying the plight of the oppressed, noting a surge in interest from artists across the globe.

Ghafari Qadir echoed this sentiment,



characterizing the festival as a gathering for "free and liberated people" worldwide.

He emphasized the event's ambition to foster global dialogue and leverage cinema as a tool to unite individuals and intellectuals dedicated to dismantling the influence of Zionism and global hegemony.

"The International Resistance Film Festival does not belong solely to Iran," Ghafari Qadir stated, "but to all free people of diverse cultures, religions, and backgrounds."

He stressed the importance of promoting a culture of resistance and translating it on an international stage.

Al-Khanjari extended an invitation to an Iranian delegation to visit Oman for a "Resistance Film Week," signaling a concerted effort to expand cultural and artistic ties.

The initiative aims to further cement the burgeoning relationship between the two countries through the medium of film.

Cartoon biennial bolsters Iran's cultural diplomacy efforts: Minister

Social Desk

Iran's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance has hailed the 12th Tehran International Cartoon Biennial as a potent tool for advancing cultural diplomacy and promoting global peace, according to a message released on Sunday. Abbas Salehi underscored the event's significance in fostering intercultural dialogue and understanding, IRNA reported.

The biennial, which showcases artistic



creativity, serves as a vital platform for exchanging ideas between artists, the public, and social actors, Salehi noted. It reflects societal shifts and contributes to the world's visual cultural heritage. The event's prominence is bolstered by the exceptional creativity and critical perspective of Iranian cartoonists, who have garnered international acclaim.

The Tehran biennial has evolved into a dynamic and impactful international event, attracting prominent artists from

across the globe, he added. This transformation is attributed to the innovative use of contemporary imagery and techniques by young Iranian artists, capitalizing on the proliferation of new media and digital platforms.

The biennial's message of peace, friendship, and human solidarity is particularly crucial in today's complex geopolitical landscape, Salehi added.

He commended the organizers and wished success to all participating artists in their pursuit of truth and justice.