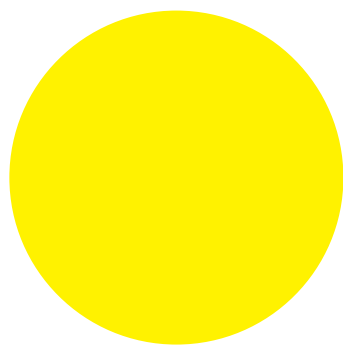


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Deterrence in shadow of ambiguity

Why war against Iran is more costly than ever

OPINION
EXCLUSIVE



By Abed Akbari

International affairs analyst

Amid the media frenzy and persistent speculation about the possibility of a large-scale military confrontation with Iran, what transpires in strategic war rooms and high-level decision-making circles is a far cry from sensationalist headlines. Viewing the scene through the lens of cold, calculating power logic reveals that the main obstacle to any direct military action in the short term is not merely the conventional military balance, but a more complex and decisive element: "the incalculable costs stemming from ambiguity." Despite fiery political rhetoric, major states and powers are inherently cautious actors. They typically resort to military force only when they can, with high confidence, predict the adversary's responses, the escalation path of the crisis, and the conflict's end point. Iran's security conundrum takes shape precisely at this point; where Tehran's behavior pattern does not fit into classic crisis management frameworks, and this very unpredictability has become its most effective deterrent shield. The fundamental challenge for Western military planners and some regional actors is that Iran does not follow a linear, easily modeled doctrine. Within this framework, responding to a limited attack does not necessarily culminate in a proportionate or purely defensive reaction. In current calculations, the adversary is faced with a "black box" in Tehran's decision-making process—a box containing a spectrum of options, from tactical restraint to horizontal escalation of the conflict, existing simultaneously. This ambiguity rules out any guarantee that a limited attack will remain confined. Relying on its regional network of influence and asymmetric tools, Iran could shift the arena of tension beyond the initial battlefield and target the adversary's vital interests in more vulnerable locations.

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Government greenlights motorcycle licenses for women

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Iranian women ride their motorbikes in a street in Tehran, Iran on September 7, 2025.
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Araghchi: Iran made no request for negotiations with US

‘Diplomacy pursued through military threats cannot produce results’

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Wednesday that Tehran has not submitted any request for negotiations with the United States, stressing that the imposition of diplomacy through military threats cannot be effective.

“In recent days, there has been no contact between me and Steve Witkoff (special representative of the US president), and no request for negotiations has been made by us,” Araghchi told reporters on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting.

Underlining that military threats and diplomacy have often existed simultaneously in international affairs, but each follows its own distinct path, Araghchi said, “Iran’s position is clear: diplomacy pursued through military threats cannot produce results. Negotiations don’t go along with threats and talks can only take place when there are no longer menaces and excessive demands.”

The top Iranian diplomat added that if negotiations are to take shape, threats, excessive demands, and the raising of irrational issues must be set aside. He emphasized that negotiations have their own principles and must be conducted from an equal position and on the basis of mutual respect.

Stressing that several countries are currently acting as intermediaries and engaging in efforts and consultations, Araghchi said Iran remains in contact with such intermediar-

ies.

The remarks came hot on the heels of the arrival of a US aircraft carrier in the region and a series of escalatory threats from Washington, where some officials have accused Iran of a violent crackdown on peaceful protests earlier in the month.

In a lengthy post on Truth Social, US President Donald Trump warned Iran that “time is running out” and that the next attack “will be far worse,” urging Tehran to make a deal as a “massive armada is heading to Iran.”

“It is a larger fleet, headed by the great Aircraft Carrier Abraham Lincoln, than that sent to Venezuela.” He warned that the fleet was ready to fulfill its mission and resort to violence if needed.

“Hopefully Iran will quickly ‘Come to the Table’ and negotiate a fair and equitable deal - NO NUCLEAR WEAPONS - one that is good for all parties,” Trump claimed.

FM talks with Saudi, Egyptian, Qatari counterparts

In a related development on Wednesday, the Iranian foreign minister discussed in a phone call with his Saudi counterpart Faisal bin Farhan bilateral relations and the escalated regional tensions as a result of the US and Israeli actions.

The two diplomats exchanged views on regional and international developments, warning about the dangerous consequences of any escalation of tensions for regional

peace and stability.

Araghchi and Bin Farhan also emphasized the shared responsibility of all regional countries and their joint efforts to maintain stability and security in the region.

Iran’s President Masoud Pezeshkian told Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on Tuesday that Tehran welcomes any process, within the framework of international law, that prevents war.

In another phone conversation, Egypt’s Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty underscored the importance of enhanced cooperation to restore calm across the region and stressed the necessity of prioritizing diplomatic solutions over escalation.

He highlighted Egypt’s position that sustainable political agreements are essential to safeguarding regional and international security and stability.

The Egyptian foreign minister also emphasized the importance of maintaining commitment to diplomacy and creating appropriate conditions for the resumption of negotiations between Tehran and Washington. He noted that renewed talks could pave the way for a comprehensive agreement on Iran’s nuclear file, one that takes into account the interests of all parties while contributing to regional and global stability. On Tuesday night, Iran’s foreign minister also held a separate telephone conversation with Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Qatar Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman



Abbas Araghchi
IRNA

Al Thani. The two sides reviewed bilateral relations and discussed regional and international developments.

During the call, Araghchi and his Qatari counterpart stressed the need to continue diplomatic efforts, expand bilateral cooperation in areas of mutual interest, and maintain coordination aimed at preserving regional stability and reducing tensions amid ongoing geopolitical challenges.

‘Iran will defend itself and respond like never before’

Meanwhile, Iran’s permanent mission

to the United Nations said on Wednesday that the Islamic Republic is prepared for discussions with the United States but will defend itself if it is provoked.

“Last time the US blundered into wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, it squandered over \$7 trillion and lost more than 7,000 American lives,” the mission said in a post on X.

“Iran stands ready for dialogue based on mutual respect and interests- BUT IF PUSHED, IT WILL DEFEND ITSELF AND RESPOND LIKE NEVER BEFORE!”

Top military officials warn anti-Iran adventurism will ‘cost enemy dearly’



Ahmad Vahidi



Habibollah Sayyari

International Desk

Rear Admiral Habibollah Sayyari, deputy chief of the Iranian Army for Coordination, said on Wednesday that Iran’s enemies have failed militarily and are now waging hybrid and cognitive warfare, stressing that any hostile move against the country would cause serious damage and heavy costs for the adversaries.

“When the enemy does not achieve results through military actions, it continuously exerts pressure in the realm of soft war and hybrid war; however, we are not inexperienced in this field. The country’s officials and our people are familiar with the concepts of soft war, hybrid war, and cognitive war, and they know that the only way to counter the enemy’s tricks under current conditions is unity, cohesion, coordination, empathy, and mutual support,” he said.

Sayyari underlined that the enemy has sought to break this unity, but the Iranian people has always neutralized the enemy’s tricks in a timely manner,

adding that the enemy is trying to undermine this cohesion and empathy, but would certainly fail, because the people of Iran are aware and insightful and know the enemy very well. “The United States has been pursuing the implementation of gunboat diplomacy. They try to intimidate the other side by deploying large ships and extensive equipment and to convey the impression that they can inflict damage,” said the Iranian commander, on the display of US military power through the deployment of aircraft carriers.

Washington has just deployed the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln and its accompanying strike group to West Asia near Iran, and Trump said on Tuesday that another US “armada” of naval vessels was sailing toward the Islamic Republic.

“It should not lead us into miscalculation when the enemy hypes up the arrival of one fleet and then says that another one was added. If an incident occurs, they can rest assured that they too will be damaged, and

this damage will be heavy,” Sayyari stressed.

IRGC Deputy Commander Brigadier General Ahmad Vahidi said Iran’s defense capabilities have been developed in the recent years so greatly that any miscalculation by the enemy in waging war against Iran will be too costly. “Iran’s defense power has developed to a great extent that initiating war against Iran will cost it very dearly for the enemy,” Vahidi said.

Referring to the enemies’ previous failures in confronting the powerful Islamic Iran, Vahidi noted that enemies of the country thought that they could weaken and undermine the Islamic Establishment with exerting pressures and orchestrating plots but the experiences during the eight years of the Sacred Defense (Iraqi imposed war against Iran in 1980-1988) as well as the 12-day Israeli imposed war showed that not only the Islamic Establishment was not undermined, but also it strengthened the Islamic Revolution.

The 12-day war imposed by the US and the Zionist regime in June 2025 was fully technology-centric and represented the most modern form of warfare to date, with the highest level of advanced technology employed, he highlighted. Vahidi noted that the Islamic Republic of Iran entered the conflict by relying on its own technological capacities as well as the power of faith, and ultimately emerged victorious.

Eslami: Tehran to continue nuclear progress despite sanctions

International Desk

Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Mohammad Eslami underlined on Wednesday that sanctions and political pressure would fail to stop the Islamic Republic from advancing nuclear, quantum, and high-tech programs.

Dismissing recent remarks by the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) regarding Iran’s alleged non-compliance with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Eslami questioned how inspections can be conducted at nuclear facilities that have been subjected to military attacks.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting, Iran’s nuclear chief said Tehran expects Rafael Grossi, head of the IAEA, to refrain from using such language and to act strictly within his legal mandate.

Eslami stressed that the IAEA operates under the United Nations framework and that its statute clearly defines the responsibilities and obligations of its director general. He said the agency must remain committed to its legal duties in both its reports and public statements.

Touching on the obstacles imposed by Western countries on Iran’s nuclear progress, Eslami said such challenges stem not from misinterpretation, but from deliberate efforts to hinder technological advancement. He noted that official development and national security strategy documents of developed countries, particularly the United States, place nuclear development at the top of their strategic priorities. Eslami pointed out that a recent document signed and issued by the US president prioritizes the development of advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence,



IRNA

nuclear technology, and quantum science, with defined quantitative and qualitative goals. He said it is therefore a legitimate right of the Iranian nation to prioritize the same fields based on national interests, adding that Iran will not allow any stagnation in its technological development.

He also rejected the notion that nuclear technology is limited to atomic weapons, noting that Iran exports nuclear-related products to 50 countries and maintains exports across various sectors. He said Iran’s nuclear activities span areas including mining, healthcare, food security, environmental protection, and energy.

Turkey, Tajikistan urge Iran-US de-escalation

International Desk

Turkey’s Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan warned on Wednesday that a United States attack on Iran would be “wrong,” calling on Washington and Tehran to resolve their issues diplomatically and gradually.

In an interview with Al Jazeera, Fidan called for regional cooperation as the US amasses military assets in the West Asia region amid a spike in tensions with Iran. “It’s wrong to start the war again,” Fidan said.

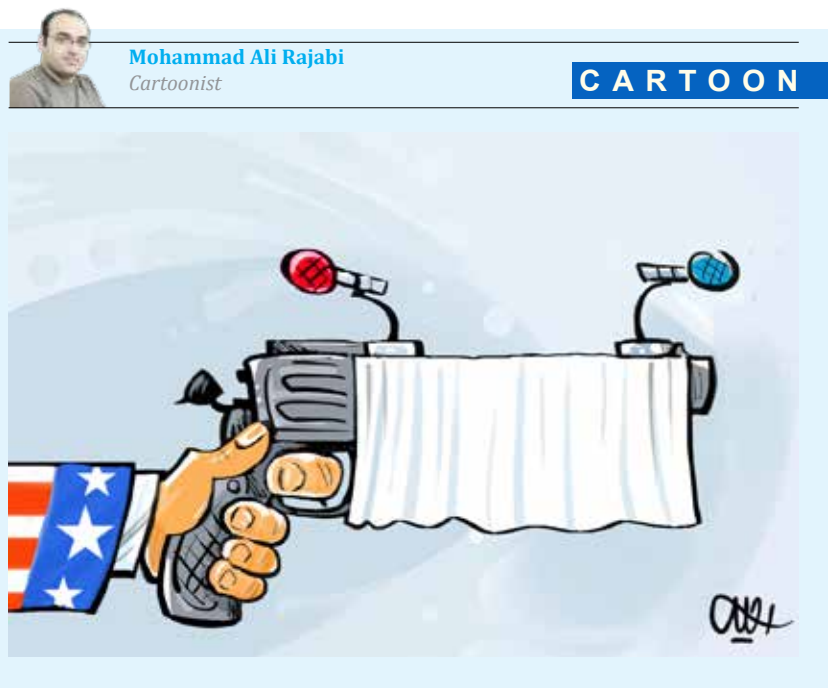
The US has sent an aircraft carrier strike group to the Persian Gulf as Washington continues to threaten to launch renewed attacks against Iran after last June’s 12-day conflict.

Tajikistan’s Foreign Ministry also reacted to the escalation of tension in the region as a result of the United States, stressing that there has to be intensified efforts for de-escalation.

In a statement, Tajik Foreign Ministry emphasized that Dushanbe opposes any military actions against Iran and supports the peaceful resolution of all conflicts ex-

clusively through the diplomatic means. Tajikistan is seriously concerned about the escalation of the situation in the West Asia, particularly with regard to Iran, the statement said, adding that the ministry emphasized that Dushanbe “opposes any military actions and supports the peaceful resolution of all conflicts exclusively through diplomatic means.”

The Tajik side also urged all parties to adhere to the principles of the UN Charter and the norms of international law, and to “make every effort to preserve peace and stability in the region.”



Minister says essential goods supply secured amid international pressure

Economy Desk

Iran is capable of supplying essential goods and foodstuffs under any circumstances, whether through the coupon system or without it, Agriculture Minister Gholamreza Nouri-Qezeljah said Wednesday on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting.

"In the past 1.5 years, essential goods have been abundantly supplied throughout the country despite war and international pressures, and we have no supply problems," IRNA quoted the minister as saying.

"In the first days of coupon-based sales, occasional shortages were reported which our colleagues immediately addressed, but we have received no shortage reports since two to three days after the food coupon plan's launch," he added.

The presidency's website said in early January that amid continued economic pressures and with the aim of ensuring food security, improving livelihoods and increasing stability and predictability in the economy, a comprehensive government support plan comprising 15 articles has formally entered the implementation phase. The

government also announced a major expansion of its food coupon program to help ease pressure on consumers from rising staple food prices. In the first phase, and on an interim basis, the plan would allocate 10 million rials per month (approximately \$6.25) in purchasing credit per person for 80 million Iranian citizens for a period of four months.

"In the past two weeks we faced a sudden mass demand in the market; in the first phase of the coupon system, nearly 80 million people purchased essential goods valued at \$481.25 billion," the minister said.

According to an ISNA report Wednesday, customs data showed 158,232 tons of various essential goods entered the country in the past 24 hours, including 245 tons of red meat. During the same period, 6,640 trucks carrying essential goods were loaded and departed from the country's customs points.

The minister continued: "Needed goods, primarily essential items and agricultural food products, have been made sufficiently available to the people."

"This situation demonstrates the government's efficiency and



coordination across all sectors related to food security, which has been able to meet needs to this extent, and the country's food security infrastructure is capable of supplying food requirements under any conditions," he said.

Wastewater network reaches 9m connections, covers 56% of population: Official



Economy Desk

Iran's wastewater connections have reached nearly 9 million and the network's length has expanded to 75,000 kilometers, a senior official from the National Water and Wastewater Engineering Company said at the 18th national conference on

wastewater operations in southern port of Bushehr, according to ISNA.

"Currently 41 million people are covered by the wastewater network, meaning nearly 56% of the country's population falls under this network's coverage," said Mor-teza Ehteshami, Director General of the Wastewater Op-

eration Supervision Department at the company.

"Currently, 278 urban wastewater treatment plants and 44 rural treatment plants are active across the country," he added.

"Over six million cubic meters of wastewater are collected daily in more than 300 cities covered by

the wastewater system," he said. "The country's current effluent production volume stands at 1.8 billion cubic meters."

"For better maintenance of the wastewater network, dredging, videometry and network washing have been placed among the strategic priorities of the National Water and Wastewater Engineering Company, and companies must improve their performance to reach the predetermined percentages in relevant indicators," Ehteshami said.

"The largest volume of produced effluent is used in agriculture, with a small portion allocated to industry, and companies are required to increase the industrial usage share," he added.

Foreign trade value drops 11% despite 2% rise in volume

Economy Desk

Iran's total foreign trade value reached \$94.123 billion in the first 10 months of the current Persian calendar year that began on March 21, 2025, marking an 11.36% decline. By weight, the country's total foreign trade amounted to 163.213 million tons in this period, showing a 2% increase, Iran's Customs Administration announced on Wednesday, as reported by ISNA.

During this period,

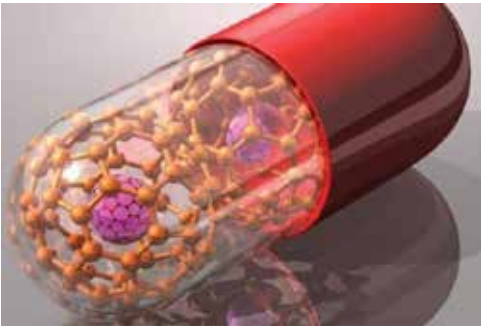


130.036 million tons of various goods valued at \$45.015 billion were exported to different countries, registering a 1.44% rise in weight but a 6.3% drop in value compared with the same period last year. In the first 10 months of the current year, 33.177 million tons of goods valued at \$49.107 billion were imported into the country, reflecting a 4.6% increase by weight and a 15.6% decrease in value year on year.

Iranian firm secures US patent for nano-cocrystal curcumin tech

Economy Desk

A nano-cocrystal curcumin invention developed by an Iranian knowledge-based company has been registered with the United States Patent and Trademark Office, with support from Iran's Intellectual Property Management Center (IPMC), ISNA reported on Wednesday. The invention has been commercialized with the technology already introduced to markets through three human-consumption products — oral lozenges, oral vials and beverages — and two animal products. Nano-cocrystal cur-



cumin represents a next-generation bioactive compound technology designed to enhance oral absorption of curcumin. The compound traditionally suffers from less than one percent oral absorption due to extremely low water solubility. The nano-cocrystal approach

The advancement enables incorporation of curcumin into diverse food and pharmaceutical formulations while reducing required dosage to less than one-tenth of existing market products, potentially delivering significant effects for joint pain, migraines and various cancers, vice presidency said.

Unique features of the technology include a more than 10,000-fold increase in water solubility, high stability under varied storage conditions, and the capacity to convert curcumin into a natural energizer, the vice presidency added.

Deterrence in shadow

The inability to accurately model the "escalation ladder" has turned every attack scenario into a high-stakes gamble—a gamble in which the initiator of the conflict will not necessarily call the shots on its course and conclusion. In today's interconnected world, where the global economy and energy security have become the Achilles' heel of major powers, this risk takes on more complex dimensions. The concern over Iran's creative and unconventional responses

—responses that could impact energy flows, the security of international waterways, or the stability of global markets—drives up the cost of war beyond the "acceptable" range.

When a state actor cannot be sure that a conflict will be confined to purely military targets and sees the possibility of the rules of the game being transformed, strategic logic dictates that the military option be set aside.

From this perspective, the current situation should not be seen

as a sign of lasting peace. What has prevented war is a kind of balance based on fear and ambiguity—a situation in which the adversary steers clear of entering a dark tunnel with an unknown end and, instead of direct confrontation, falls back on political, economic, and diplomatic pressure tools. As long as this ambiguity regarding the manner, timing, and intensity of Iran's response persists, the likelihood of a full-scale war in the short term will fall victim to rational cost-benefit calculations.

Israel after disintegration in pushing Trump to attack Iran

INTERVIEW

Iran-Europe ties have entered an ambiguous and tense phase in recent months—a phase in which diplomatic language has given way to blunt, and at times hostile, statements by some European leaders, and their official stances on Iran's internal developments are interpreted as going beyond the conventional norms of international relations. At the same time, signs of Europe's growing alignment with Washington's pressure-driven approach have raised serious questions about the continent's real standing in the diplomatic dealings with Tehran.

In this climate, speculation is running rampant about the role of European capitals in encouraging the United States to ramp up pressure on Iran, even to the point of pursuing high-cost options.

Against this backdrop, Jalal Sadatian, Iran's former ambassador to Britain, has discussed the objectives and consequences of Europe's recent policies toward Iran. Sadatian believes that developments following the Ukraine war placed Europe in a confrontational position vis-à-vis Iran, and that European actors are now fueling the narrative that Iran has turned against its own people, seizing the opportunity to settle scores with Tehran. He adds that under these circumstances, Tehran's diplomacy must also be reassessed, particularly as to why it failed to take steps

to prevent the emergence of such conditions.

Following recent positions taken by European officials on Iran's internal unrest—including remarks by the German chancellor and European Union officials—can it be said that Europe has effectively moved off the diplomatic track and entered a phase of direct political confrontation with Iran?

SADATIAN: These days, we are witnessing the formation of an international propaganda line claiming that Iran has been weakened. At the same time, a similar narrative has been taking shape in the US Congress, particularly driven by the Israeli lobby. All these efforts revolve around the assertion that Iran is in its weakest position, attributing

this situation to recent domestic dissatisfaction and protests, as well as earlier developments in the Middle East, including what unfolded after October 7, 2023, in the Gaza Strip, Lebanon, and Syria. Within this same framework, the issue of the Israeli 12-day war against Iran in June is also raised. In that war Iran responded effectively to the aggression, to the point that the US called for a cease-fire. Some in Iran criticized the decision, asking why Tehran accepted a cease-fire at a moment when conditions were such that it could

have inflicted greater damage on the Zionist regime [of Israel] and created stronger deterrence to sustain a halt to hostilities. At the same time, there was another analysis suggesting that the continuation of Iranian attacks could have provided a pretext for deeper US involvement in the conflict. Ultimately, various considerations converged on the decision to accept a cease-fire. So, when we speak of developments after October 2023, this is what I am referring



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu answers a question, as US President Donald Trump looks on, during a dinner at the White House on July 7, 2025.

AFP

to, in brief.

In the latest developments, we have seen popular protests driven by economic and livelihood hardships, along with some criticisms that were initially acknowledged by the authorities, who even decided to engage in dialogue with protesters and hear their grievances. However, the protest movement later turned violent, and the government's assessment is that the initial peaceful protests were derailed through external guidance. It must be noted that the nationwide shutdown of international internet access added to the ambiguities.

As a result of this combination of factors, the field was left wide open for foreign propaganda and the activities of anti-Iranian entities to promote and amplify the idea of Iran's weakness. Consequently, the West moved to justify its interventions under the cover and instruments of human rights. In this atmosphere, we witnessed Europe falling into step with the United States. This is even though Europe, on its own bilateral issues, has been in its worst state of relations with Trump's America, due to White House claims regarding Greenland, the Ukraine war, and trade tariffs, all of which have caused serious rifts between Europe and the United States.

Unfortunately, in recent years Iran failed to mend fences



Tehran's diplomacy must also be reexamined and subjected to critical review as to why it was unable to take steps to prevent the formation of this situation in relations with Europe.

with Europe over disputes that emerged in the wake of the Ukraine war. Europe came to view Iran as a direct adversary, standing alongside Russia against the security of the continent. As a result, the snapback mechanism was instigated by the European Troika, and we are now witnessing a hostile approach by European leaders at this juncture. European countries have concluded that the overall conditions surrounding Iran have created the best possible confrontational opportunity for them, and thus they are fanning the claim that Iran has turned against its own people. Under such circumstances, Tehran's diplomacy must also be reexamined and subjected to critical review as to why it was unable to take steps to prevent the formation of this situation in relations with Europe.

Reports suggest that some European states have sought to encourage US President Donald Trump to pursue tougher options against Iran, even to the level of military action. What specific strategic interests is Europe pursuing by following such a path?

I believe that encouraging the United States to go to war with Iran is being driven by the Zionist lobby, which seeks the fragmentation of Iran in order to break a country that has mounted serious resistance to Israel's illegitimate expansionism. At the same time, they believe that the regional resistance will, over time and with Iran's backing, rebuild and reconstitute itself. It can be said that the aim of these pressures is to draw the United States militarily into the Middle East.

My assessment is that Europeans are not particularly eager for a unilateralist America to take control of Middle Eastern governance. Countries such as France and Britain still see themselves as having a rightful stake in our region and maintain a sense of attachment to it. Therefore, some individual remarks should not be taken as Europe's overall position. We should not forget that Europe lacks consensus on foreign policy issues. That said, our own performance has led them to close ranks and find common ground in opposing Iran.

This interview first appeared on IRNA in Persian.



A general view of the European Parliament.

dpa

Escalated US military presence in Persian Gulf: Deterrence, messaging, and strategic anxiety



By Masoud Dashti Derakhshan
Political analyst

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The United States has significantly stepped up its military

presence in the Persian Gulf, most visibly through the deployment and docking of naval forces in Bahrain, which hosts the US Navy's Fifth Fleet. The arrival and movement of warships, destroyers and support vessels have attracted close attention across the region, prompting renewed scrutiny of Washington's intentions at a time of height-

ened geopolitical tension. At face value, US officials describe these deployments as routine maritime security measures, designed to uphold freedom of navigation and protect global energy supply routes. The Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz remain among the world's most vital maritime chokepoints, where even limited

disruption could ripple quickly through international energy markets. From this standpoint, the reinforced naval presence is presented as reassurance to US allies, particularly Persian Gulf Arab states, that Washington remains committed to regional stability and security. Yet beyond official messaging, both the timing and the scale

of the deployments point to a broader strategic calculation. Rather than signaling preparation for an imminent military confrontation, the buildup functions primarily as a deterrent, rather than a preparation for imminent military confrontation. By maintaining a visible and sustained naval presence, Washington aims to demon-

strate readiness, shape escalation dynamics and discourage unilateral actions that could further destabilize the region. At the same time, this display of force reflects a deeper strategic reality: the gradual erosion of uncontested US dominance in the Persian Gulf. Over the past decade, regional power balances have shifted. Iran's growing

indigenous military capabilities, particularly in asymmetric warfare and anti-access strategies, have increasingly complicated traditional US power projection in the region. As a result, the United States has become more dependent on forward deployment, allied bases and coalition-based frameworks to preserve operational flexibility. The concentration of US naval assets in Bahrain underscores this reliance. Rather than operating freely from distant waters, American forces increasingly require regional infrastructure, logistical depth and sustained political cooperation from host governments. This dependence exposes underlying vulnerabilities and highlights the high costs of maintaining a


long-term military presence in an increasingly contested environment. The current US posture also carries a pronounced psychological and political dimension. Warships are not deployed solely as military assets but as tools of strategic communication. Their presence sends messages not only to Iran, but also to domestic audiences and international partners. It projects resolve, helps mask strategic uncertainty and buys time for diplomatic maneuvering. In this context, naval deployments function as instruments of signaling as much as instruments of force. Crucially, a heightened military presence does not automatically confer strategic advantage. Large naval platforms face growing ex-

posure in confined maritime spaces where advanced surveillance, missile systems and unmanned technologies can blunt traditional forms of superiority. The geography of the Persian Gulf itself limits maneuverability, turning sustained presence into a calculated risk rather than an unambiguous show of strength. Ultimately, the US military build-up in the Persian Gulf is best understood not as an assertion of uncontested power, but as an effort to manage declining strategic freedom. It reflects Washington's attempt to preserve influence in an environment where deterrence is increasingly mutual, escalation is costly, and miscalculation could produce consequences that extend well beyond the region.



● AP

US seeks to press Iran into concessions without regime change



By **Qiuomars Yazdanpanah**
Professor of geopolitics at University of Tehran

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West Asia is facing an exceptionally complex and sensitive moment, one that increasingly appears to be the most critical phase the region has experienced since the start of the 21st century. Tensions between Iran and the United States have escalated at such a pace that it has become difficult to predict what might unfold over the next 24 hours, the next few days, or even the coming week. What is unmistakable, however, is the scale and configuration of the US military build-up around Iran, alongside the tone and substance of Washington's political messaging. At the level of US leadership, particularly in statements and signals coming from President Donald Trump, a clear narrative has taken shape. That narrative revolves around two central assumptions about the region's immediate future. First, the United States appears intent on intensifying political and psychological pressure in order to force Iran, under its current conditions and with its existing political system intact, to accept US demands across multiple fronts, especially at the regional level. The expectation in Washington is that Tehran should comply with US terms without considerations, preconditions or counter-demands, with the implicit promise that such compliance would avert a US military strike. Second, the situation has entered what can best be described as a decision-making phase. This is not only a decisive moment for Iran, but also for the United States and for the wider international system. From Washington's point of view, decisions must be taken swiftly. US officials increasingly claim that Iran has failed to act in time and that decisions must therefore be imposed upon it. This approach, framed from a position of superiority and de-



The photo shows Iranian missiles on display at an exhibition in Tehran. ● FARS

livered in a directive manner, has significantly heightened the risks surrounding a potential military attack on Iran and has made such a scenario far more plausible than in the past. Should war erupt, it would not be limited or symbolic. The likelihood is a full-scale, wide-ranging military confrontation. Past experience suggests that when the United States enters a theatre where it has already established a military presence, it

does so at maximum capacity, deploying its full range of military power. Under these conditions, any conflict would pursue a combination of military, political and strategic objectives. What can be assessed with greater confidence is the pattern of US military positioning and, in parallel, the nature of Iran's official and media discourse. There are growing indications that Tehran itself now considers a military attack more likely than other scenarios. The current alignment of forces and rhetoric between Iran and the United States points less to diplomacy and more to a clear war posture. As military and security pres-

ures continue to mount across the region, the probability of armed confrontation rises accordingly, pushing conditions into territory far more severe than anything seen in recent years. At the core of this assessment lies a critical point: the US administration's approach toward Iran is fundamentally strike-oriented. From Washington's perspective, military action increasingly appears to be the last remaining lever of pressure, a conclusion reinforced by regional movements and deployments now playing out across West Asia. When these developments are compared with similar episodes



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in previous decades, the differences are stark. The scale, scope and nature of the current military arrangements around Iran are unprecedented. Historically, such configurations have rarely led to anything other than a full-scale conflict with long-term aims. In this sense, the present moment stands apart as highly exceptional. The United States, acting in coordination with its NATO allies and regional partners, appears to have accepted the risks inherent in a military strike on Iran. Another factor shaping the current landscape is the deeply painful episode Iran experienced between 8 and 10 January, when peaceful protests over economic hardship escalated into violence and bloodshed. Beyond their immediate human and social costs, these events produced a significant security outcome: they exposed the vulnerability of Iran's major and strategically important cities. The January unrest demonstrated how susceptible large metropolitan areas, major urban centers and even the capital Tehran itself can be under conditions of internal instability. Attention now turns to how the situation will evolve in the days ahead. What is clear is that Iran is likely to face a series of highly unusual and consequential political and security developments in the months to come, developments that may push the country from one phase into another.

The article first appeared on ILNA in Persian.



A Boeing F/A-18E Super Hornet lands on the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln in the Indian Ocean on January 22, 2026. ● AP

FIVB Volleyball Nations League 2026:

Tricky tests await Iran in preliminaries



Iranian opposite spiker Amin Esmailnejad (10) goes up for a spike during a straight-set victory over Bulgaria at the Volleyball Nations League in Gdansk, Poland, on July 20, 2025.
● FIVB

Sports Desk

Iran has been drawn into a challenging pool alongside Brazil, Bulgaria, Argentina, Serbia, and Belgium for Week 1 of the FIVB Men's Volleyball Nations League 2026, which will start on June 10 in Brasília.

The full fixtures list for this year's competition is yet to be announced by the sport's international governing body.

Iran was beaten in straight sets by South American heavyweight Brazil in its VNL opener last year – also played in Brasília – but concluded the preliminary phase with a 3-0 win against World Championship finalist Bulgaria.

Iran also played Argentina and Serbia in the previous edition, winning 3-1 on both occasions, before defeating the latter in a five-set thriller in the World Championship round of 16 last September.

The second week of action, from June 24-28, will see Iran visit Orléans, France, where Roberto Piazza's men will be joined by the host and reigning Olympic champion France, Japan, the United States, Cuba, and Serbia once again.

Iran and Serbia are also in the same pool in the third and final week of the preliminary round – starting July 15 in Belgrade – alongside Slovenia, Türkiye, Germany, and Ukraine.

The top eight teams from the preliminary 18-team standings will progress to the VNL Finals, which will start in Ningbo Beilun, China, on July 29, though China is already guaranteed a place in the quarterfinals as the host.

Iran will be looking to take inspiration from a decent run of results under Piazza in the Italian's first year in charge as they chase a first last-eight spot in four years at the annual presti-

gious tournament.

Iran will aim to build on a promising first year under Piazza by securing its first quarterfinal berth in four years at the prestigious annual tournament. After finishing in the bottom three in the two editions prior, Iran staged a late surge in the 2025 preliminaries to place eighth, earning six wins in 12 matches. However, Piazza's team ultimately missed out on a place in the Finals, as China's host status granted them a quarterfinal spot despite the Asian side finishing second from bottom. The momentum from some impressive VNL performances – which included victories over Ukraine, Argentina, and the Netherlands – carried into the World Championship in the Philippines, where Iran advanced to the quarterfinals, before suffering a 3-1 setback against the surprise package of the showpiece event, Czechia.

AFC Futsal Asian Cup:

Iran begins title defense with Malaysian win

Sports Desk

Iran's title defense started with a 4-1 win against Malaysia in their AFC Futsal Asian Cup Group D opener in Jakarta, Malaysia, on Wednesday.

Malaysia forced Baqer Mohammadi into making two early saves, both efforts from Awalluddin Nawi but it was Iran who would take the lead inside the opening minute.

A mix-up between goalkeeper Syaifuddin Syukri and Saad Sani saw what was supposed to be an easy gather turned into a simple tap-in for Mohammadhossein Derakhshani.

Mohammadi came to the rescue of Iran again in the fifth minute, coming out of his goalmouth to stop a marauding Firdaus Ambiah who had broken through the last line of defense.

Similarly, Syaifuddin had to work hard to prevent the gap from widening, making a smart reflex swing to tip away Salar Aqapour's rasping drive in the 10th minute and then sticking his leg out in

the 18th to clear a volley from the same player before Hossein Tayyebi cracked a shot against the post just before the break.

After the interval, Malaysia continued to soak up Iran's pressure with the occasional counter attacks looking dangerous but the reigning champion's efficiency came to the fore in the 25th minute.

Aqapour – from the kick-in – teed up Behrooz Azimi for a precise low strike into the bottom corner which Syaifuddin could do nothing about.

Iran was brimming with confidence now, adding a third a minute later when Tayyebi capitalized on a Malaysian mistake to fire home from the edge of the semi-circle.

Moslem Oladqobad added another for Iran in the 28th minute with Malaysia netting a late consolation through Awalluddin.

Elsewhere in Group D, Afghanistan opened its campaign with an impressive 3-0 win against Saudi Arabia.

Reza Hosseinpour starred with two goals as Afghanistan – quarterfinalist in 2024 – got the resounding start it was seeking.

Japan, meanwhile, signaled its title intentions by overpowering Australia 6-2 in their opening Group C match.

The four-time champion produced a dominating performance at the Indonesia Arena and displayed its attacking talent with six different players finding the back of the net. On Tuesday, Indonesia produced an attacking masterclass as it kick-started its Group A campaign with a 5-0 win against Korea Republic. Iraq also enjoyed an impressive start in the group, securing a thrilling 4-2 win against Kyrgyz Republic.

In Group B, Thailand powered up in the second half to beat a spirited Lebanon 2-0, with goals by Worsak Srirangpirot and Muhammad Osamanmusa giving the 2024 runner-up a well-earned win.

Vietnam came from behind twice to defeat Kuwait 5-4 in a Group B thriller.



Iranian players celebrate a goal during a 4-1 win against Malaysia at the AFC Futsal Asian Cup in Jakarta, Malaysia, on January 28, 2026.
● AFC

Iran to ponder Guijosa's future after below-par Asian handball



● IRIHF

Sports Desk

The future of Spanish head coach Rafael Guijosa Castillo is in doubt following Iran's disappointing campaign at the Asian Men's Handball Championship in Kuwait.

An injury-hit squad forced Iran to withdraw from its final classification match against Jordan on Tuesday and settle for a 12th-place finish among 15 teams.

While "not satisfied by the team's performance," Alireza Pakdel, the president of the Iranian Handball Federation, said the governing body's Technical Committee will have the final say on whether to continue with the Spaniard. Guijosa was appointed to the job for a second spell last September, having guided Iran to a historic bronze at the 2014 Asian Championship in his previous stint.

"The Technical Committee will make a full assessment of Iran's results at the Asian Championship, before making the final decision on Guijosa's future, though significant changes regarding the coaching staff look unavoidable," Pakdel said on Tuesday.

Iran opened the tournament

with a 24-22 loss to four-time bronze medalist Saudi Arabia in Group D of the preliminary round but rebounded to thrash Australia 39-13 in its second outing in the 22nd edition of the event.

A draw against Japan in its final preliminary game would have been enough for Iran to secure a main-round spot. However, Guijosa's men relinquished a five-goal lead in the second half, with Daisuke Tanaka's winner at the death sealing a 30-29 victory for the two-time champion, sending Iran into the classification round for 9th-15th places (the Martyr Fahad Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Cup). Iran hammered India (39-16) and Australia (37-17) in Group IV, but, playing without injured star players Pouya Norouzzinejad, Mohammadreza Oraei, Yassin Kabirian, Vahid Masoudi, and Saber Heidari, suffered a 33-23 loss to China on Sunday to finish runner-up in the classification group table.

"We were in the so-called 'group of death', according to handball experts in the competition," Pakdel said, adding: "Saudi Arabia boasted its strongest squad of recent years, which had won the sil-

ver at the Islamic Solidarity Games [last November]. Japan, on the other hand, had made it to the final in the previous edition and was the only Asian side at the 2024 Paris Olympics. We have not been in such a difficult group in any of the past several editions."

"We were unlucky to miss our star player and skipper Alireza Mousavi for the Saudi game due to late arrival of the team and a delay in submitting the 16-player list.

"It was a major shock and disrupted the technical staff's plans and strategies.

"After bouncing back against Australia, we faced Japan in a decisive match where we perhaps witnessed one of the best performances by the Iranian national team in recent years. I am glad that expectations for Iranian handball have risen so high that we were hopeful of beating Japan. Despite 56 minutes of brilliant play by the national team and the lead we had built over Japan, we threw it all away in the final four minutes. Therefore, the technical committee will thoroughly review the situation that led to the late collapse," added the IRIHF chief.

Lori dress; manifestation of ancient local civilization



● kojara.com

Iranica Desk

Iran, with its rich cultural diversity, is a mosaic of various ethnic groups, each contributing to the formation of the ancient civilization of this land. Among them, the Lori people, with a brilliant history, have a significant share in this history. One of the most prominent manifestations of this culture is the traditional Lori dress, which not only indicates a style of clothing but also reflects the beliefs, living conditions, geographical location, and social values of this people. The dress of the Lori people has taken shape over centuries and generations and has evolved to suit life in the mountainous regions of Zagros. The use of durable fabrics, designs suitable for mobility, and adaptation to cold and heat demonstrate the intelligence

of the Lori people in adapting to their natural environment. These garments are the result of long experiences of nomadic and rural life, and each component has a specific and meaningful function. On the other hand, Lori dress is not merely functional but also encompasses a specific aesthetic. The colors, patterns, and decorations used in women's and men's clothing express emotions, spirits, and social status. For example, the bright and diverse colors in Lori women's clothing are symbols of hope, life, and social vitality, while men's clothing, with its simplicity and sturdiness, is a sign of the strength, honor, and epic spirit of this people. Furthermore, Lori local clothing differs in various occasions such as celebrations, weddings, religious rituals, and tradition-

al ceremonies from everyday wear, indicating the deep connection between clothing and social customs. Every change in the type of clothing conveys a specific message and is a kind of silent language of Lori culture. Today, with the spread of modern life and changes in clothing styles, the risk of local garments being forgotten has increased. Therefore, understanding and introducing the dress of the Lori people is not only a cultural act but also an effective step in preserving Iran's intangible heritage. Examining this traditional dress helps us become familiar with the identity, history, and lifestyle of people who have preserved their authenticity amidst the changes of time. Negar Motlaq, a designer and tailor of local clothes, in an interview with Mehr News

Agency regarding the color and type of fabrics used in sewing local dress, said, "Local clothes have a direct relationship with the age of individuals. Elderly women often use fabrics with simple, mild, and sometimes dark patterns and colors and few decorations. In contrast, the clothing of girls and young women has a pleasant variety of bright colors and beautiful patterns, and usually more jewelry and decorations are used in them." She continued, "In newer designs and models, young girls welcome more patterned sleeves and prefer different types of headscarves known as Charqad." Regarding the components of local clothing, Motlaq explained, "Hat, vest, headscarf known as Charqad, skirt, and the coins they fasten on their

foreheads, the beautiful pins attached to the headscarf are parts of Lori dress. Married women often do not use hats and tie another scarf under the headscarf on their foreheads, or their scarves are usually white and floral." The designer and tailor of local clothes added, "Charqad is a square-shaped piece of fabric made of thread or silk that is folded diagonally and placed over the head. Usually, light-colored fabrics are chosen for the Charqad, and large flowers also form its beautiful patterns. In fact, the Charqad is the same as a headscarf. Tribal women usually use floral Charqad for their covering." She continued, "Local dress is not just fabric and sewing; each has a story and a spirit and is the product of the hands of artists who hold centuries of experience within them."

Motlaq added, "The intricate embroidery patterns, needlework, stunning color combinations derived from nature and culture, are all unique patterns for creating new works. What holds special value in local clothes is their authenticity and handmade nature. In a world where everything has become mechanical and uniform, that warmth and precision in sewing, those delicate details created only with love and patience, are infinitely valuable." She emphasized, "Every local dress is a complete mirror of a people's identity. By looking at a dress, you can guess part of the history, lifestyle, beliefs, and even the geographical situation of those people. These clothes are our cultural identity cards, and this very diversity doubles the beauty of Iran."

Witness beauty from Qal'eh Qiran's historic summit in Ilam

Iranica Desk

Mount Qal'eh Qiran is a symbol of Ilam and one of the city's most important tourist attractions. The area around the mountain is covered with ancient oaks, and in spring the adjacent plains are filled with grasses and wild, beautiful flowers that attract every observer. This major tourism attraction, which was registered as a national heritage site in 2003, is also used as a symbol in the Ilam taxi company's logo and in the state network of Ilam. Mount Qal'eh Qiran is located about 5 kilometers west of the provincial capital of Ilam, near the Shashdar recreation area. Because of its close proximity to the Shashdar Forest, it has a special geographical position. This unique location, along with its rich history and the beautiful sedimentary rocks of the mountain, have made Qal'eh Qiran — also nationally registered in 2003 — a notable landmark. The summit of Qal'eh Qiran rises to a height of 2,152 meters, where traces of a very ancient fortress remain. According to historical documents, the fortress's antiquity — one of the oldest structures in Iran — dates back to the



Parthian era and was probably used for guard purposes at that time. But this is not the only historical significance that makes the area unique. The region also features distinctive natural characteristics: a dense forest of ancient trees on the mountain slope, springtime flowering plains nearby, and a pleasant climate in the first half of the year, all of which attract tourists to Ilam. The mountain's very steep slope makes reaching the summit challenging, but visiting the area in the early seasons of the year and enjoying its natural beauty is very rewarding. The sedimentary structure of Qal'eh

Qiran has formed naturally over time. The plains, forests, and green areas of the region owe their existence to abundant water resources, such as the Surtāf Waterfall. Farzad Sharifi, Director General of the Ilam Province Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, told ISNA that the mountainous areas of Ilam Province and the Qal'eh Qiran area, due to their location on the slopes of the Zagros Mountains, have very rich and unique flora and fauna. To date, 32 mammal species and 183 bird species have been identified in these areas, most of which live in



● safarmarket.com

the region's restricted hunting zones or migrate seasonally to this area. Sharifi explained that the vegetation of this region is also very special, and in spring and summer the plains are full of beautiful wildflowers and colorful poppies, creating an extraordinarily scenic landscape. There are also diverse plant species and some medicinal plants among the characteristic flora around Qal'eh Qiran. He elaborated that Qal'eh Qiran and the surrounding areas are located in the Zagros Mountain region, and for this reason they have a cool, mountainous climate. Winters on

this mountain are very cold, with temperatures dropping to as low as -15 to -20 degrees Celsius, and annual precipitation exceeding 600 millimeters. However, its weather in spring and summer is pleasant and enjoyable. In these seasons, the surrounding plains offer an extraordinary view of wildflowers. Mount Qal'eh Qiran has a very steep slope, and there is no suitable path for traversing and ascending to its summit; moreover, there are no special welfare facilities in the area, which is why access to it is mostly feasible for climbers and professional rock climbers.

Due to the mountainous climate in this region, the best time to visit Qal'eh Qiran is spring and summer, when the climate is pleasant, temperate, and cool, and the breathtaking, flower-filled plains around are visually striking and dreamy. The province of Ilam itself is a hidden gem of western Iran, where the rugged folds of the Zagros Mountains cradle ecosystems of astounding diversity. Beyond the mountain's ancient oaks and spring blooms, Ilam's nature is a tapestry of dense forests, roaring and deep valleys that serve as sanctuaries for wildlife. This is a land where the call of rare birds echoes through oak woodlands, and the hill-sides in spring are painted with vibrant carpets of wildflowers, including scarlet poppies. The climate, with its sharp seasonal contrasts — from snowy, brittle winters to lush, mild spring — sculpts a dynamic and resilient landscape. Visiting Qal'eh Qiran offers more than a historical journey; it is an immersion into the very heart of Ilam's pristine and powerful natural identity, a reminder of the enduring beauty preserved within Iran's wild western highlands.



Government greenlights motorcycle licenses for women

Social Desk

Iran's cabinet approved a nationwide framework on Wednesday to provide formal motorcycle training and pave the way for issuing licenses to women, government spokesperson Fatemeh Mohajerani said after the weekly meeting, marking the first executive move to operationalize a policy long debated within the administration. Under the decision, the commander of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Law Enforcement Forces is tasked with organizing practical motorcycle training for female applicants as a prerequisite for licensing, IRNA reported. Training will be delivered primarily by female instructors, with examinations conducted by female officers; male officers may be used only where staffing is insufficient and subject to Islamic and legal requirements, Mohajerani said. The regulation prioritizes electric mo-

torcycles and sets out detailed safety standards, including mandatory certified helmets and technical requirements related to braking and road safety, she added. Oversight will be carried out directly by traffic police. Vice-President for Women and Family Affairs Zahra Behrouz-Azar said the licensing decision had been finalized and that implementation would begin in the coming days. She described motorcycle mobility as a practical response to daily transport needs, traffic congestion and air pollution, noting that the absence of licenses had prevented women from obtaining insurance. With the cabinet regulation now in place, she said, there would be no remaining obstacle to issuing licenses, and inter-agency coordination had concluded. Behrouz-Azar added that the regulation specifies the format of training and calls on the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade, Iran National Stan-

dards Organization (INSO) and other relevant bodies to support the rollout of standardized electric motorcycles and appropriate safety gear. Following the cabinet decision, the Motorcycle & Automobile Federation of Iran said registration had opened immediately at its specialized academies. Federation president Reza Pazandmehr said infrastructure was in place to deliver training on standard tracks under full safety protocols, with dedicated coaches available for women, and that competitive events would also be organized in line with technical standards to support professional development. The move builds on the government's earlier position in September that there was no legal ban on women receiving motorcycle licenses, articulated by Mohajerani, when Behrouz-Azar said existing regulations were sufficient and implementation required only administrative cooperation.



An Iranian woman navigates city streets on her motorbike in a street in Tehran, Iran, on September 7, 2025.
● WANA

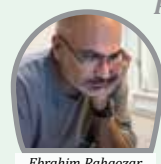
44th Fajr International Theater Festival

'Homay', a theatrical narrative of Iranian woman through history

By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

Within the vibrant tapestry of the 44th Fajr International Theater Festival's 'My Iran' section, playwright and director Ebrahim Rahgozar unveils 'Homay', a compelling drama weaving together threads of womanhood, history, and the very essence of Iranian identity. Through a prism of historical and social insight, the play illuminates the enduring struggles of women across three distinct eras, as they strive to claim their rightful place within society.



Ebrahim Rahgozar

Rahgozar describes 'Homay' not as a mere chronicle of the past, but as a resonant dialogue between bygone eras, myth, and the present moment, a testament to our shared cultural and human heritage. A powerful nexus point, the play is anchored by the unwavering spirit of womanhood, a relentless pursuit of justice. Believing 'Homay' to be both a re-examination of ancient narratives and a bold artistic response to the complexities of our time, Rahgozar envisions it as a bridge, a space where divisions may mend, families reconnect, and hope for the future takes root. The following is a detailed conversation with Rahgozar:

IRAN DAILY: Could you elaborate on the story of 'Homay'? How do you interweave the narratives of three women

across three different historical periods, and what is the common thread connecting their lives?

RAHGOZAR: The play recounts the stories of three women who, across three distinct historical epochs, strive to attain their due rights. Consequently, we witness three interwoven narratives. The first is the story of Homay, the first female ruler of Iran. The second is the tale of a Homa who endeavors to become the first Muslim female actor in Iranian theater. The third is the story of a Homa in the present day, a director attempting to stage a play about a young woman during the Qajar period who is passionate about acting. However, the opening night of the play coincides with the 12-day war between the Zionist regime and our beloved country, Iran, presenting her with a series of obstacles. The unifying element in these stories is, first and foremost, the element of "womanhood," and secondly, the fact that all three are striving to claim what is rightfully theirs. This is the shared occurrence that unfolds in each narrative. Even the choice of the play's name was derived from 'Homa,' as it signifies felicity, and this felicity resonates within each of the three stories.

Was the story of 'Homay' initially conceived with the 12-day war as a central theme, or did the events of the war alter the course of the narrative?

The story wasn't initially intended to take its current form. As the play was nearing completion, Israel's attack on Iran and the 12-day war transpired. Our Homa, who was attempting to stage her play, was experiencing marital difficulties, and



her parents had abandoned her and emigrated. However, the narrative then shifted to a point where, due to the war, she is unable to stage her play, as theaters are closed and those events unfold. However, what transpires is that Homa's father, who hadn't spoken to his daughter in 10 years due to their disagreements, sends her a message at the onset of the war, stating that they are returning to Iran and attempting to rebuild his life there to be near his daughter. In effect, the war facilitates their reunion, and this event takes shape within the story.

Were there any prior performances of 'Homay' before its festival debut? And what are your future intentions regarding the continuation of this production?

'Homay' had public performances before its appearance at the festival. Unfortunately, due to recent events and the circumstances that arose in the country, those performances were suspended. In fact, we were only able to stage it for 15 nights before appearing at the festival. Certainly, performances

will continue after the festival, as a great deal of effort has been invested in it.

Our group is comprised of young artists, and the young members of our company are striving to prove themselves and introduce their work to the nation's artistic landscape, much like Homay in our story. This festival has been a window of hope for us, allowing us to better introduce ourselves and perhaps secure a performance in a state-owned venue, as the costs of performing in private halls are prohibitively expensive for us. Our play features 13 actors, and we've invested approximately 5,000 million rials in this production, and unfortunately, there has been no return on that investment; that figure doesn't even include the actors' salaries, we haven't factored those into the expenses at all. Therefore, we hope that this work will receive special attention and support.

Given the play's exploration of Homay, the first female ruler of Iran, a figure of limited historical documentation, could you elaborate on her character, the period of her reign, and how her life is represent-

ed within the theatrical work? Homa, the Iranian ruler (the 16th Iranian ruler and the 7th of the Kayanian dynasty, according to Ferdowsi's 'Shahnameh'), is the daughter of Bahman and exists within our myths and legends. As far as I've studied, she reigned for 30 years, was a just ruler, and a founder of many developments in our land. One of these is the cultivation of horses, which was a significant and novel undertaking during her time; one could say she was the first ruler during whose reign widespread horse breeding took shape. The events that transpired during her historical period are fascinating and unique. She is the mother of Darab; the very Darab who has his own seven trials, as documented in the 'Darrabnameh' and other historical texts.

Given the limited information available about Homa's life, we endeavored to employ some imagination, to envision that era, and to conceive of the events of that time. Perhaps many were not pleased that a woman was a ruler, and we sought to explore her challenges, her desire to serve her people, yet being left alone, and facing various wars and crises during her reign. I would say that roughly half of this narrative stems from history; a history intertwined with myth, and in truth, derived from legends, legends occupy a space between myth and history, and their stories have been passed down through generations. Consequently, a portion of her story in this play is a product of my imagination as the playwright, to render the narrative a bit more dramatic. Our play is designed as a "play within a play," and we have striven to utilize all the techniques of our traditional and ceremonial theater to create

greater appeal for the audience and make the play more memorable.

The attainment of rulership by a woman in our history arguably highlights the significance of women's roles throughout our nation's past. What is your view on this matter?

As the word "woman" suggests, in our literature and culture, women have always held a special place; woman represents life and procreation, everything originates from woman, and all things are born from this sacred being. Women have always held a special place in our history, and prominent women have always been present in our literature, and successful women have always been celebrated.

Could you share your perspective on the recently introduced 'My Iran' section of the festival? Do you believe it holds promise for continued inclusion in future editions?

We saw some excellent works in the 'My Iran' section that resonated with the theme of the 12-day war and the current atmosphere of our homeland, a commendable development. However, the 'My Iran' section isn't necessarily limited to the 12-day war or a single event. As the name of the section suggests, it can encompass all events related to Iran, at any point in history, by introducing prominent figures and important occurrences. Because a nation that doesn't know its own history is prone to error. I believe the addition of such a section is very special and valuable. I hope it becomes a core part of the festival in the future and perhaps even develops into a separate festival of its own.