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INTERVIEW
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With tensions between Iran and the United States on the rise, Egypt's Foreign Minister Badr Abdellaty has intensified diplomatic outreach, engaging officials from both sides along with counterparts in Qatar, Turkey, and Oman, and urging a return to diplomacy over military solutions. Egypt's efforts to defuse tensions are not unique, as other regional states are pursuing similar initiatives, but Cairo's motivations may differ. Abdul Amir Nabavi, an expert on Egyptian affairs, told Iran Daily that beyond seeking to avert the fallout of military escalation in the region, Egypt aims to prevent a shift in the balance of power in Israel's favor, while also working to bolster its standing as an effective and responsible regional actor.

IRAN DAILY: What security, geopolitical, and regional considerations have prompted Egypt to actively engage at this stage in diplomatic efforts to reduce tensions between Iran and the US?

NABAVI: Egypt, like other Arab actors in the region, is deeply concerned about current developments. In effect, the escalation of the crisis and the possibility of a renewed war would carry profound and negative consequences for the security and economies of regional countries. Egypt, much like Turkey and other Arab states, is worried that intensifying disputes over the Iran file could drag the region into a crisis with no clear end in sight. An uptick in clashes and the risk of war could set off waves of migration, ethnic and sectarian conflicts, increased arms smuggling, and similar destabilizing phenomena across the region.

Egypt, already anxious about developments in Libya, Sudan, and Gaza, fears that the Iran file could further add fuel to the fire of existing crises. On the other hand, should Israel achieve its objectives with regard to Iran, the decades-long balance prevailing in the region would be disrupted, allowing Israel to emerge as an unrivaled power in the Middle East. The elevation of Israel's regional standing is not something Turkey, Arab countries, and especially Egypt are prepared to accept. They prefer, under current conditions, that the existing balance be preserved in some form.

At the same time, by stepping up diplomatic engagement and seeking ways to manage and de-escalate the crisis, Egypt is also working to enhance its own regional standing.

Ayatollah Khamenei warns of regional war if US attacks Iran

International Desk

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei stressed in a stark warning that any war initiated by the United States against Iran would turn into a regional war.

Addressing a large gathering of people on Sunday, the Leader said recent US rhetoric about war and military assets was nothing new.

"The Americans should know that if they start a war this time, it will be a regional war," he said, stressing that threats and displays of military power will not intimidate the Iranian nation.

"Sometimes they talk about war and speak of aircraft and warships; this is not a new thing," he said, recalling that US officials had repeatedly threatened Iran in the past by claiming that "all options are on the table, including the option of war."

Referring to US President Donald Trump's threats against Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei said, "The Iranian nation should not be frightened by these things; the people of Iran are not affected by such threats."

He emphasized that Iran would not be the initiator of any war, but warned of a firm response to aggression.

"We are not the ones who start [a war], and we do not want to attack any country, but the Iranian nation will deliver a hard punch to anyone who attacks and harasses it," he said. In another part of his speech, the Leader described the recent riots across Iran as "similar to a coup," saying the plot aimed at destroying sensitive and effective centers involved in running the country.

He said attackers targeted police stations, government centers, Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) facilities, banks, and mosques, and even set the Holy Qur'an on fire, noting that the attempt had ultimately been thwarted.

The Leader also said the Iranian people had reduced the flames of the recent American-Zionist sedition to ashes, just as they had defeated previous conspiracies, adding that the nation will decisively confront any future challenges as well.

Ayatollah Khamenei cited returning the country to its rightful owners — the people — and cutting off US influence from Iran as another defining characteristic of the Islamic Revolution, saying this feature angered and unsettled Washington and drove it, from the very beginning, into hostility toward the Iranian nation and system.

Referring to Iran's advances in various fields, he said few would have believed that the Iranian nation would one day reach a point where Americans would copy weapons produced by Iran.

He said such achievements were the result of self-confidence, hope, and ambition instilled in the nation by Imam Khomeini, whom he described as a symbol of hope and self-belief who motivated the people toward effort and progress.



Leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei addresses a gathering of Iranians from all walks of life in Tehran on February 1, 2026.

khamenei.ir



IRGC: EU's blacklisting of elite force lacks legal, political legitimacy

Iran designates European armies 'terrorist groups' in tit-for-tat move

International Desk

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) strongly condemned the European Union's decision to designate the Iranian military force as a "terrorist" organization, saying that the move lacks any legal or political legitimacy.

The IRGC in a statement on Sunday said such actions not only fail to contribute to regional peace and security but complicate "the path to constructive interaction and cooperation."

It also lashed out at the EU for aligning with US interventionist policies while ignoring the destabilizing role of regional actors, particularly the Israeli regime.

The statement added that such measures would not affect the IRGC's resolve but instead strengthen national unity and its determination to protect Iran's interests and security.

On Thursday, the European bloc added the IRGC to its terrorist list in response to the force's role in the Is-

amic Republic's response to recent riots in the country, which were triggered by protests over economic problems on December 28. According to Iranian officials, more than 3,100 people, including security forces and ordinary people, have been killed in the protests.

During an open session of Parliament on Sunday, Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said Iran considers European countries' armies as terrorist groups in a counter-measure against the EU. "The IRGC is the world's most unique anti-terrorism institution, which, with the help of the people of the region, brought down the Daesh rule and eliminated the global threat of the terror outfit," he said.

"The enmities of the world's terror supporters will not diminish the IRGC's power. I announce that under Article 7 of the law on reciprocal action against the [US's] declaration of the IRGC as a terrorist organization, the armies of European countries are considered terrorist



Iranian lawmakers, dressed in military fatigues, chant slogans in support of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps during a parliament session in Tehran on February 1, 2026.

● ICANA

groups, and the EU bears responsibility for the consequences of this action."

He added that the 27-member bloc's decision, which was taken "in compliance with the orders of the US president and the leaders of the Israeli regime, accelerated Europe's path to becoming irrelevant in the future world order."

Qalibaf said the national security parliamentary commission would deliberate on the expulsion of EU countries' military attaches and follow up on the issue with the foreign ministry.

The IRGC was first proscribed by the US in 2019 during US President Donald Trump's first term, by Canada in 2024, and by Australia in 2025.



Government releases full list of persons killed in riots



National Desk

Iran's government released in a statement on Sunday the names of those killed in recent foreign-backed riots across the country, which resulted in the death of more than 3,100 people.

President Masoud Pezeshkian on Wednesday ordered the public re-

lease of the names of the victims in a bid to declare the real death toll after some Persian-language media operating outside the country reported a much higher death toll in the protests.

The names of the 2986 people, including security forces and ordinary people, were released by the government on Sunday, except for

131 who are yet to be identified. Iranian authorities have already announced the death of 3,117 people during the protests which began over economic problems on December 28 but turned violent after the United States supported riots in the country.

The statement underlined that all victims of the recent incidents were "children of this land", and no bereaved family should be left helpless. Unlike the enemies and ill-wishers of the country, who treat human lives as mere numbers and seek their political gain, from the perspective of the Islamic Republic, those who lost their lives in the tragic events are not merely statistics, the statement said.

Pezeshkian also on Wednesday instructed Justice Minister Amin-Hossein Rahimi to work with the judiciary to speed up the release of those detained during the unrest, according to a statement on the president's website.

Egypt moves to ...

Naturally, if Egypt's mediation efforts—whether by initiating direct

Page 1 > talks or at least dialing down the intensity of the crisis—bear fruit, its role as a prudent, responsible actor with significant regional weight would be brought into sharper relief.

Given Egypt's track record in mediating issues related to Iran's cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency, how do you assess Cairo's chances of helping prevent a further escalation of the current crisis?

There is no doubt that Egypt's efforts are serious, sincere, and responsible. However, it must be noted that the areas of disagreement between Tehran and Washington are numerous and long-standing. A review of the mutual accusations exchanged between Iran and the US shows just how protracted this file has become and how its complexities have piled up over time. In certain respects, the disputes have

taken on the character of identity-based confrontation.

Accordingly, mediation efforts—whether undertaken by Oman, Qatar, Iraq, Turkey, or Egypt—will not pay off simply or quickly. In other words, beyond the sincere and sustained efforts currently being made by the Egyptians, reducing points of contention also requires political will on the part of both sides to the conflict.

What constraints does Cairo face in its efforts, particularly in light of Egypt's strategic relations with Washington?

Egypt does face constraints in this regard, primarily because the number of key actors involved in this file is substantial. The complexity of the Iran file is partly due to the multiplicity of stakeholders: China, Russia, Britain, the European Union, and numerous regional countries—and most importantly Israel—each of which acts based on its national interests and its own perception of

the Middle Eastern environment. Therefore, while Egypt seeks to step in and play a role, other actors are simultaneously pursuing extensive efforts either in alignment with or in opposition to Cairo's initiatives, with Israel's negative role arguably the most consequential.

Can Egypt's diplomatic synergy with Qatar, Turkey, and Oman evolve into a regional consensus capable of deterring US military scenarios?

No, it cannot. First, the US, Israel, and the European Union do not necessarily share identical assessments of the present situation, nor do they always pursue the same goals with respect to Iran. Moreover, regional countries do not want the existing balance to be disrupted in Israel's favor, while at the same time they do not seek a resurgence of Iranian power. Their efforts will therefore continue only to the extent that they prevent Iran's disintegration or outright defeat.

Araghchi excoriates US military buildup in Persian Gulf

International Desk

Iran's foreign minister in a post on X criticized the US military presence in the Persian Gulf, saying Washington is attempting to dictate how Tehran should conduct military activity near its own borders.

Abbas Araghchi attached an image to his post, highlighting the geographic distance between the United States and Iran with the Strait of Hormuz marked to underscore Iran's proximity to the strategic waterway.

"Operating off our shores, the US military is now attempting to dictate how our Powerful Armed Forces should conduct target practice in their own turf," he said.

Araghchi stressed that freedom of navigation and the safe passage of commercial vessels through the strait are of vital importance to Iran and its neighbors, arguing that "the presence of outside forces in our region has always caused the exact opposite of what is



declared: promoting escalation instead of de-escalation."

His remarks came amid the US military buildup in the Persian Gulf region and tensions with Iran. US President Donald Trump has threatened Iran with military attacks over the Islamic Republic's response to recent foreign-backed riots which were triggered by protests over economic woes on December 28.

The Strait of Hormuz is a strategic waterway through which around 20% of the world's oil supply passes.

Ayatollah Khamenei warns ...

The Leader described remarks by the US president as a clear sign of the American and Zionist nature of the recent unrest, saying he openly encouraged what he called rioters by telling them, "Go forward, I am also coming."

Ayatollah Khamenei said the Islamic Republic's new way of thinking and its friction with

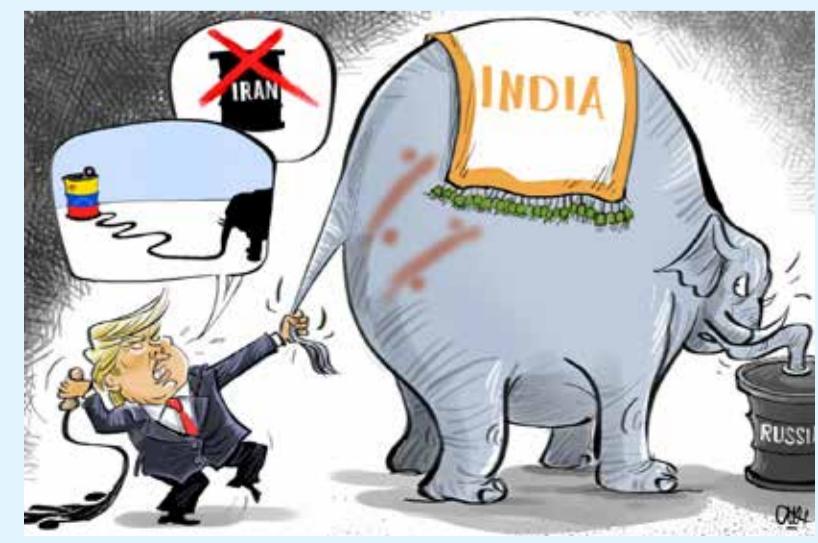
the interests of global bullies explained the persistence of hostility, adding that just as the recent sedition was not the first in Tehran, it would not be the last, and similar incidents could recur. Such enmities, he went on, would continue until the Iranian nation, through steadfastness and full control over its affairs, caused the enemy to despair.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi

Cartoonist

CARTOON



First ESP installed at South Azadegan, 35,000-barrel capacity boost expected by June



Economy Desk

The first electrical submersible pump (ESP) has been installed and commissioned at Iran's South Azadegan oil field, a move expected to support output growth at one of the country's key production sites, according to state-run news agency SHANA. The ESP was installed in well number 93 as the first of its kind at the field. It was designed and installed to offset reservoir pressure decline, boost production rates, and improve operational control conditions. Installation of the pump in well number 93 is expected to increase the well's daily output by approximately 1,000 barrels. The measure also improves oil flow stability and reduces production fluctuations across the South Azadegan field. The pump was specifically engineered for the field's unique conditions, includ-

ing variable flow rates, potential sand production, corrosive fluids, and high temperatures. It incorporates resistant raw materials and advanced protection systems.

According to SHANA, the completion of 50 ESP installations by June is on the agenda and is projected to increase South Azadegan's production capacity by about 35,000 barrels.

The report did not mention the field's output figure, however, Iran's Petropars Group CEO Hamidreza Saqafi had announced earlier on January 26 that the company had increased crude oil production at the South Azadegan field by more than 63,000 barrels per day through a series of technical and operational measures.

Application of the ESP technology enables precise monitoring of downhole data and optimized production management while

significantly reducing well control limitations during emergency situations.

Due to pressure decline in certain wells and low natural production capacity, deployment of ESPs in the Sarvak Layer has been planned. With manufacturing and delivery of 50 ESP units now completed, the installation program remains on schedule for the South Azadegan field, the report said.

Lessons learned from the successful implementation at well number 93, including improved operational procedures and enhanced field supervision, will serve as the foundation for expanding this technology to other wells in the field.

The next phase of the project involves developing intelligent monitoring systems and implementing predictive analytics aimed at further increasing production stability and maximizing reservoir efficiency.

Iranian crypto exchanges not affected by OFAC sanctions



Economy Desk

No sanctions have been imposed on domestic Iranian cryptocurrency exchanges, according to local exchanges and fintech industry activists, following the US Treasury Department's designation of two London-registered digital asset trading platforms.

The US Treasury Friday announced that Zedex Exchange Ltd and Zedexion Exchange Ltd were added to the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) sanctions list over allegations of financial cooperation with networks linked to Iran's economy and processing transac-

tions involving sanctioned individuals and entities. While the Treasury placed these two UK-based digital asset exchanges on its sanctions roster, rumors circulated online suggesting Iranian domestic crypto platforms had also been sanctioned. The claims prompted swift responses from Iranian exchanges and fintech activists, with authorities confirming that no domestic platform appears on the updated sanctions list, ILNA reported. Several media outlets and news agencies, after reviewing the OFAC statement text, emphasized that no Iranian domestic

platform was included and that reports about sanctions on Iranian exchanges lack an official basis. In response to the spreading rumors, major Iranian exchanges — including Nobitex, Wallex, Bitpin, Ramzinex, Abantether and Tabdil — issued official statements declaring that no sanctions had been levied against them and that their services continue uninterrupted. The published statements stressed that misinterpretations of foreign reports had fueled the rumors and urged users not to transfer their assets based on unofficial news. Some platforms additionally warned against moving capital to unidentified foreign exchanges, affirming that user asset security remains intact on domestic platforms. Iran's cryptocurrency market has evolved

into one of the most significant sectors of the country's digital economy in recent years, with millions of Iranian users actively buying and selling digital assets on domestic platforms. Consequently, any news or rumor regarding sanctions or operational restrictions on local exchanges can trigger widespread concern among users. Reports over recent days about sanctions on two Iran-linked exchanges generated a wave of anxiety across social media, though examination of the official OFAC statement from the US Treasury Department confirms the measures do not involve exchanges operating within Iran. Iran has been under Western sanctions for decades over its nuclear program, with the oil and energy sectors hit the hardest.

CBI circulates five-million-rial notes to ease cash transactions



Economy Desk

The Central Bank of Iran on Sunday began circulating newly issued five-million-rial notes through the banking system to ease cash transactions.

According to ISNA, the central bank will distribute the pre-printed notes through the banking network beginning Sunday within the framework of plans to manage cash circulation. The measure is sole-

ly intended to facilitate cash exchanges and provide a suitable replacement for smaller denomination banknotes and does not signify a new monetary policy or any change in the country's liquidity volume.

Earlier, the first version of the new generation 500,000-rial note was unveiled on January 1. The CBI Governor Abdolnasser Hemmati stated at the unveiling ceremony that "henceforth, gradually all Central

Bank notes will be produced based on new security features." He expressed hope that with production growth, economic development, and the CBI's efforts in managing money and foreign exchange markets, the national currency's value would be further strengthened.

In recent months, Iran's currency has fallen to its lowest level on record, reaching around 1,580,000 rials to the US dollar on Sunday.

Tens of meteorological projects inaugurated nationwide, including six in Markazi

Economy Desk

Iran inaugurated 62 meteorological projects simultaneously in the presence of Roads and Urban Development Minister Farzaneh Sadegh Malvajerd at Arak Airport in Central Iran, with six of the weather infrastructure projects entering service in Markazi Province.

According to IRNA, Sadegh Malvajerd announced the commissioning of one synoptic station adjacent to

the airport, two climatology stations, and three rain gauge stations across Markazi Province, stating these facilities would undoubtedly enhance data precision and ultimately improve weather forecasting. Sahar Tajbakhsh, the head of Iran Meteorological Organization, said at the ceremony, "Flight safety has been achieved with the inauguration of the Arak synoptic meteorological station." The deputy minister of roads and ur-

ban development added, "Although meteorological projects are not costly compared to some affiliated agencies of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development from a financial perspective, their governance outputs play a decisive role in saving human lives, and saving even one life has a value beyond any financial indicator." Tajbakhsh elaborated on the importance of the Arak Airport synoptic station, stating, "Given weekly flights, meteorological data especially during

aircraft landing and takeoff phases, including horizontal visibility, air pressure and other atmospheric parameters, is of high importance and this station's information can play an effective role in enhancing flight safety and health."

"Simultaneously with this project, five other stations have also been launched across Markazi Province, and with this station included, the number of meteorological stations in the province has reached 116, which

increases daily meteorological data and adds approximately 130,000 new data points monthly, playing an important role in more precise monitoring of atmospheric conditions and improved forecasts," she noted.

Referring to Arak Airport's special climatic conditions, particularly its proximity to Meyqan Wetland and its effect on regional humidity, Tajbakhsh emphasized, "These features double the importance of meteorological information and its role in flight safety."

Political order in contemporary Egypt



Joshua Stacher
University professor
at Kent State
University

OPINION

After the 1952 military takeover, Egypt's new elites reshaped the state's political structure. Although constitutions and laws dictated how state institutions should operate, the reality often was quite different in practice. Nevertheless, these institutions did operate in distinctive, predictable ways.

Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak were careful to maintain and expand presidential authority vis-à-vis the other institutions of state. Maintaining such a hierarchy ensured that the president had autonomy to act while others were constrained. The Egyptian political system was not without institutionalized competition or debate.

However, state institutions were only allowed to contest each other in limited ways. Generally, the new organizations created after 1952 were unable to act without the president's blessing, while institutions created before that time struggled but kept a limited semblance of independence.

The legislature consists of upper and lower houses: the Consultative Assembly (Majlis al-Shura) and the People's Assembly (Majlis al-Sh'ab). Before 2011, two-thirds of the seats in the upper house were elected, and the president appointed one-third. The legislature always has had circumscribed authority. Although it was involved in ratifying constitutional amendments and signing treaties into law, the Consultative Assembly submitted to the lower house's authority. Furthermore, the upper house was almost completely dominated by the ruling NDP under Sadat and Mubarak. (It did not exist under Nasser.) After the 2011 uprising, the Muslim Brotherhood took approximately 45 percent of the seats in the Consultative Assembly. While this normally would not mean much, Morsi's administration relied on the Consultative Assembly after he became president because a court ruling allowed SCAF to dissolve the elected People's Assembly. The Consultative Council was dissolved two days after the military coup that ousted Morsi, in July 2013, and this body was abolished by the 2014 constitution, which most people put down to the military-led transition.

The lower house traditionally has been the vehicle of legislative authority. Nasser, citing the divisive character of democratic politics, banned parliament. Sadat resurrected the institution in 1971 as he tried to brand himself a rule-of-law president. Despite elections occasionally being open under Sadat and Mubarak, the NDP always enjoyed a parliamentary supermajority, ensuring that the president's agenda would always be passed and the speaker of parliament could ignore formal opposition or dismiss it through a vote. This kind of control was crucial, as the People's Assembly is empowered to pass legislation, approve the state's budget, question ministers, and approve or renew martial law. The Muslim Brotherhood won nearly 50 percent of the assembly's seats after the uprising, but the body was dissolved by the military after a



Egypt's members of parliament attend a session in Cairo.

● AFP

court ruling declared the election unconstitutional a few days before the presidential run-off in June 2012.

New parliamentary elections were held in October and De-

became a sticking point for Mubarak. He never disregarded a SCC ruling, but he was selective in his implementation of rulings from the state administrative and cassation (highest appeal) courts.

legal and banned opposition groups never really pushed the ruling regime, whether under Nasser, Sadat, or Mubarak. Curiously, however, there were legal opposition parties, civil society



Banner of then-army chief Abdel Fattah El-Sisi and former presidents Gamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar Sadat, Cairo, July 26, 2013.

● ASMAA WAGUIH/REUTERS

ember 2015. A majority of seats were won by independents, making it difficult in early 2016 to determine what the character of the new parliament will be. In any case, few observers inside or outside the country believe the body will have any authority, since the military is in de facto control of the presidency and the country. Egypt's judiciary has been the state institution in which most of the fiercest contestation has taken place since 1952. Courts established in the colonial era became the sites where people challenged colonial authorities. In the process, legal training was developed and judges became professionalized. By 1952, Egypt's judiciary was more advanced than those in many other decolonizing states. Nasser largely left the judiciary to its own devices, but in 1969, not long before his death, he purged the judiciary of political opposition. When Sadat committed himself to the rule of law, he brought the experienced judges back to the bench. The judiciary's independence

Mubarak also relied on martial law regulations to try opponents and override legal protections with specially designated courts. He even occasionally used military trials for civilians. Some judges refused to accept submission to Mubarak. Twice during the Mubarak era they pushed for laws to expand judicial independence. The regime responded with laws that incrementally reduced judicial autonomy, leaving the judiciary somewhat compromised. Many judges are well trained and continue to assert themselves, but others were appointed on the basis of their loyalty to the Mubarak regime or have been co-opted, undermining the overall integrity of the institution. Nevertheless, Egypt's judiciary remains a model in the region. With respect to opposition politics, no organized movement ever threatened, attempted, or was capable of toppling the Free Officers regime. While there were national protests against economic austerity in 1977 and a spontaneous uprising in 2011,

organizations, and the region's largest Islamist movement. Compared to other authoritarian states in the region, Egypt looked stable despite the amount of opposition it tolerated, especially with respect to Islamist groups. Egypt's largest Islamist group, the Muslim Brotherhood, is also the oldest such movement in the Arab world.

Founded in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna, the Brotherhood was and continues to be subject to fierce debate. People try to speculate what the group's positions are with respect to democracy, women, and minorities. Because the group maintained a paramilitary wing in the 1940s (like all Egyptian parties at the time), detractors continue to ponder the Brotherhood's relationship to violence. Yet debates about intentions tend to be unsatisfying because definitive answers are rarely supplied. Part of the problem is the Brotherhood's huge constituency. Egypt's Muslim Brothers tend to have a number of different opinions and viewpoints. While the Brotherhood's leadership in the

late-Mubarak period tended to be pragmatic and almost boringly managerial about its politics, it was possible to find very liberal Brothers as well as stanchly conservative members, in views, dress, and manner.

Egyptians and outside observers continue to speak about the Brotherhood as if it still really exists. The fact of the matter is that following the 2013 military coup, the Muslim Brotherhood changed, and it is no longer the same organization. It has been decentralized and scattered organizationally. Whether it can ever be reconstituted in its pre-coup form is highly unlikely, given how fiercely the group's networks and resource base has been attacked. Given the military's intervention in 1952, it is unsurprising that the armed forces remain the regime's spine.

During Nasser's presidency, over a third of all cabinet ministers were from the military. This number decreased to 20 percent under Sadat and 8 percent under Mubarak. Yet military officers were not pushed out of the establishment altogether. They remained the key appointees in crucial provinces, ensuring that order was maintained.

The military's capacity to participate in politics dwindled between 1952 and 2011. However, in exchange for the professionalization of its ranks, the military began to control monopolistic market shares in some sectors of the economy. While the military's companies were initially dominant in the public sector, their role has changed over time. They can now be found in the private sector and in public-private joint ventures, and at times they act as local representatives for foreign investors. The military's companies make everything from staples such as olive oil and bread to heavy industrial items such as tanks. The military also remains in charge of the petrochemical sector and is Egypt's largest landowner.

When political order breaks down, the Egyptian military emerges as the state's last line of defense. The 2011 uprising provided the military with the opportunity to intervene and eliminate its political and economic competitors. Hence, the military used the uprising to save a part of the regime but also to discredit Gamal Mubarak's economic reform team and the politically ascendant interior ministry. The uprising also allowed the SCAF to largely dictate the terms and sequence of the transition. Even after Morsi's election, it was never clear

that the military couldn't defect at a moment's notice. When they did and al-Sisi became the de facto and then real president, the state's institutions, particularly the media and the judiciary, practically tripped over themselves to support the new regime-in-formation. Whether one looks at it from the perspective of contestation among state institutions, elections, parliaments, or the presence of rejectionist or accommodationist opposition, Egypt has regressed in the wake of the military coup.

The article first appeared in the book 'The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa' edited by Mark Gasiorowski and Sean L. Yom.

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Since 1952, Egypt's presidency has dominated politics, limiting the power of parliament and the judiciary. This pattern persisted under Nasser, Sadat, and Mubarak, and even after the 2011 uprising, institutional competition remained tightly controlled.

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The military has been Egypt's ultimate power broker. Its interventions in 2011 and 2013 weakened elected institutions, sidelined opposition, and reinforced authoritarian control.

Egypt's foreign policy in the modern Middle East



O P I N I O N

Egypt is by far the largest Arab country and sits near the center of the Middle East, so regional and international powers want a friendly relationship with it. Moreover, the Suez Canal provides the shortest distance for shipping goods and commodities between Asia and Europe. The canal was important during the colonial era, and it is no less strategic today. US national security concerns and commitments to Arab states in the Persian Gulf region, as well as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, mean the canal also serves as a crucial transportation link for the US military.

Wooing Egyptian presidents has not always been easy. During the Cold War, Egypt under Gamal Abdel Nasser tried to remain nonaligned, and Nasser's strategy was to play one superpower against the other. Essentially, whichever power attached the fewest strings to its diplomatic support and aid could rely on Egypt's friendship. The Soviets proved to be far more amenable to Nasser's insistence on non-conditionality. Thus, the Soviet Union provided extensive assistance in constructing the Aswan High Dam, as well as arms and military experts, in exchange for military cooperation. Yet, in many respects, the Egyptian-Soviet relationship remained shallow.

Egypt needed extensive foreign military assistance in this era because of its ongoing state of war with Israel. In 1948, Egypt was part of the Arab attack on the new Israeli state. In 1956, Britain, France, and Israel launched a joint invasion of Egypt, which Nasser weathered until the United States and Soviet Union intervened to stop the aggression. Then in 1967, Israel struck a massive blow that destroyed nearly all of Egypt's air force. A steady war of attrition between Egypt and Israel continued along the Suez Canal after the 1967 war, producing more casualties on both sides. In 1973, Sadat launched one more war against Israel, after his repeated attempts to gain the return of Egyptian land occupied by Israel were rebuffed.

Hostility with Israel was not the only defining feature of Egypt's foreign policy in this era. Nasser used pan-Arabism to project Egyptian power in the region. His speeches, which often invoked Arab independence and unity, resonated deeply in a region whose inhabitants believed they lived in a colonial playground. This type of rhetoric drew acolytes and rivals for Nasser from around the region. The leaders of the other Arab republics, such as Iraq, Syria, Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya, emulated Nasser's project. In fact, Syrian elites in 1958 appealed to Nasser to merge Syria and Egypt, though the resulting United Arab Republic proved to be a short-lived experiment, collapsing in 1961. Yet, during the 1950s and 1960s, pan-Arabism proved to be a mobilizing force that helped many military-based regimes consolidate their authority and punch above their weight. Even though pan-Arabism descended into its own cold war, with some Arab states sabotaging the interests of others, Nasser today remains a popular symbol of Arab strength and autonomy.

When Sadat became president in 1970, a pan-Arab foreign policy was no longer possible. Still reeling from the humiliating 1967 defeat by Israel, Nasser himself began the process of dismantling Arabism as the pillar of Egypt's foreign policy. Sadat then shifted to an "Egypt First" posture, thinking about "Mother Egypt" now would figure prominently in any foreign policy decisions, and other Arab states were responsible for themselves. To his credit, Sadat followed through. He tried approaching both the United States and Israel about regaining Egypt's occupied land but was unsuccessful. A permanent situation seemed to be settling in.

Sadat then ordered a war against Israel to change the status quo. He reportedly told his aides that if the Egyptian army could take back part of the Sinai, he would negotiate return of the rest. For good measure, he invited Hafiz al-Assad of Syria to join in the war. On October 6, 1973, both armies attacked. Egyptian forces advanced but stopped when they no longer had air support. The Syrians were left to fight Israel on their own.



Former Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser waves to crowds in Mansoura from a train car on May 7, 1960. [BIBLIOTHECA ALEXANDRINA/WIKIPEDIA](#)

While no evidence suggests that Nasser would not have done the same, Sadat's actions revealed Egypt's formal divorce with the pan-Arab era. The 1973 war was just Sadat's opening salvo. He used the legitimacy he earned in the war to negotiate with the United States and Israel. Initially shocked, US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger was unprepared to move as fast as Sadat wished. To prove his sincerity, Sadat traveled to Israel in 1977, where he offered peace in exchange for land. As Sadat pressed, Egypt drifted firmly into the US sphere of influence. The relationship was consummated when Egypt and Israel signed the Camp David peace accords in 1979. Egypt regained the Sinai Peninsula, as well as \$2.1 billion per year in US aid. This aid was broken into two segments: \$1.3 billion for the Egyptian military and \$800 million for social and economic development. US aid continues to flow to Egypt to this day, amounting to over \$60 billion since 1979.

Egypt's realignment to become an American client during the 1970s fundamentally changed the balance of power in the Middle East. As a consequence, the United States had three core allies: Saudi Arabia with its oil, Israel with its powerful military, and Egypt with its large population. And if pan-Arabism's demise was not already apparent, the peace treaty with Israel became its death knell. Indeed, Egypt was expelled from the

Arab League. Yet, despite Sadat's bold moves, Egypt's foreign policy and dependence on the United States became points of political contestation. The United States may have bought Egypt's president, but it did not own Egyptians, a state of affairs that continued under Mubarak and remains also under President al-Sisi. Status as a weak, dependent US client creates substantial tension between the Egyptian state and its citizens. In many respects, as US-Egyptian military and diplomatic cooperation have increased, a vast security apparatus has been needed to contain the population's objections. Not only was Sadat forced to rely on coercion, but Mubarak expanded it in order to do the regional bidding of the United States. Hence, major foreign policy issues, such as participating in Operation Desert Storm in 1991 or siding with the United States against Saddam Hussein in 2003, proved incredibly contentious for Mubarak. The same dynamic of bending to US will was at play when Mubarak blamed Hezbollah and Hamas for the hostilities in 2006 and 2008-2009 between those groups and Israel. Egypt's close relationship with the United States also led Mubarak to support the US extraordinary rendition program after the September 11, 2001, attacks, under which many suspected militants were tortured.

The foreign policy that Sadat initiated and Mubarak expanded left Washington with a seemingly predictable, cost-efficient way to maintain its interests in the region for nearly thirty-five years. But Sadat and Mubarak regularly had to disregard Egyptian public opinion and Egyptians' hopes for empowerment and representative governance in order to maintain their Western alliance.

The more this dynamic has changed since the beginning of the 2011 uprising, the more it has stayed the same.

The discernible pattern is that the US-Egyptian relationship remains firmly intact despite slight alterations in the operational ways the alliance moves forward.

President Barack Obama chose Cairo as the city in which to deliver a major speech to the Arab world in 2009 addressing democracy, women's rights, and human rights. In January 2011, the Obama administration was presented with a dilemma

when the Egyptian uprising began. While the administration tried to portray itself as neutral, it definitely sided with Mubarak initially. While in hindsight it appears that the United States wisely dumped Mubarak, the reality was different. The Obama administration held on to Mubarak until his incumbency was no longer viable. When it was clear the military would eject Mubarak, the United States broke with him.

Generally speaking, US officials supported the SCAF-led transition but were pleased with the election of Morsi. While uncertainty and a cool distance characterized the beginning of their relationship with Morsi, they welcomed his diplomats and spoke highly of Morsi's actions during the Israeli military assault on Gaza in 2012.

The US establishment accepted Morsi's flawed constitution, despite the vocal objections of many Egyptians.

As momentum built toward the military coup against Morsi, US officials grew uneasy. Yet when the coup happened, they refused to label it a coup because doing so would have legally required them to end the longstanding US aid relationship with Egypt's military. Furthermore, the Obama administration tried to prevent the Raba'a massacre in August 2013. Following the massacre, the administration froze aid and the transfer of military materiel, which have since been reinstated. President Obama did change the type of aid the Egyptian military receives, keeping the dollar amount steady at \$1.3 billion annually, but restricting Egypt's purchases to counter-terrorism and border-control equipment rather than combat weaponry.

While heated debate about US aid takes place in Washington and Cairo, the fundamental truth is that military-to-military ties have never been stronger, and the United States has accepted how those with power in Cairo have chosen to proceed, including mass jailing, extrajudicial massacres, and disappearances of activists and opposition groups. While the appearance of the US-Egyptian relationship has changed, the substance of the alliance endures.

The major change in Egypt's foreign relations involves the Persian Gulf Arab states. Prior to the military coup, Qatar was providing extensive aid to Cairo, amounting to \$8 billion in 2012-2013. In the week following the coup, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE supplied \$12 billion in aid. While the Saudis, Kuwait, and the UAE continue to fund al-Sisi's regime-in-formation, this aid has come with strings attached. It will be nearly impossible for al-Sisi or a successor to break from the Persian Gulf states' repressive policies or their obsession with the status quo. Yet, the injection of petrodollars into Egypt's fragile economy has allowed the new government to offset the burden of an economy that perpetually exists on the brink of severe economic crisis.

Since 2011, US-Egypt ties remain strong, while Persian Gulf states provide key financial support. This stabilizes the economy but reinforces dependence on external powers, limiting domestic reform and independent foreign policy.



Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi (l) and US President Donald Trump shake hands during a bilateral meeting in New York on September 24, 2018. [EGYPTIAN PRESIDENCY](#)

Iran coach Jafari laments race against time in Asian Cup preparation

Sports Desk

With only a month remaining until Iran's opening match at the AFC Women's Asian Cup in Australia, national team head coach Marzieh Jafari has admitted that time constraints and limited access to players have turned preparation into a challenging race against the clock.

Iran will begin its Group A campaign against South Korea – finalists in the previous edition – at Gold Coast Stadium on March 2, before taking on the formidable hosts, who reached the last four at the 2023 World Cup on home soil, at the same venue three days later.

The final round of the group phase will see Iran face the Philippines on March 8. The top two teams in each of the three groups, along with the two best third-placed sides, will advance to the quarterfinals.

Speaking about the team's plans ahead of the continental tournament, Jafari said the national training camp will begin on February 11, immediately after the



● SOGAND NAZMI/FFIRI

conclusion of the domestic top-flight season. "In practical terms, we only have about one month until our first match at the Asian Cup," the Asian Women's Coach

of the Year told the official website of the Iranian Football Federation. "This short time frame makes preparation extremely difficult and sensitive."

Jafari stressed that the lack of time is the single biggest obstacle facing her squad. Ideally, she noted, national team preparation requires a longer

period, but the league calendar and scheduling limitations have restricted access to players. "I must be honest: limited access to the players has disrupted our preparation process. Up to this point, things have not progressed as well as we expected, and that is a concern for us," she said, emphasizing that self-criticism is essential to making sharper decisions in the remaining time.

The Iran coach underlined that the compressed schedule means the staff must work simultaneously on players' mental, physical and technical readiness. "Every single training session is crucial for us. The Asian Cup is a high-pressure tournament with a very high technical level, and players must be fully prepared both mentally and physically," Jafari said. Managing training load, maintaining player health and improving team cohesion are among her top priorities, especially with little room for mistakes or interruptions. She also pointed to missed opportunities in the build-up to the

tournament. During the most recent FIFA international window, Iran traveled to Uzbekistan with a second-string squad for two friendly matches. Plans for a preparatory friendly in Australia ahead of the tournament could not be realized. "Our first match is on March 2, which means we are entering a very tight and decisive period," Jafari noted, adding that the team is scheduled to depart for Australia on February 24.

Despite the obstacles, Jafari remains hopeful. "We constantly review and criticize our own work so we can fix weaknesses in the time we have left," she said. "Our ultimate goal is the success of Iranian women's football. With unity, cooperation and careful planning, we believe we can send a cohesive and well-prepared team to Australia and represent our country with pride." Jafari led Iran to a second appearance at the finals in dramatic fashion in July last year, as her team defeated Jordan 2-1 in a must-win final Group A qualifier, topping the host nation on head-to-head criteria.

Maqsoudlou, Tabatabaei retain places, spearhead Iran in FIDE World Rankings

Sports Desk

Parham Maqsoudlou and Seyed Mohammad-Amin Tabatabaei have remained Iran's top two grandmasters, retaining their places inside the world's top 50 in the February FIDE World Rankings released by the International Chess Federation.

Maqsoudlou, Iran's No. 1 player, stayed 28th in the men's standard rankings with a rating of 2708 – five places above compatriot Tabatabaei, who is ranked 33rd with a rating of 2700.

At the summit of the standings, Norwegian superstar Magnus Carlsen continues his reign as the world's top player with a rating of 2840, followed by American duo Hikaru Nakamura (2810) and Fabiano Caruana (2795).

On the domestic front, Maqsoudlou and Tabatabaei are followed in Iran's men's rankings by

Pouya Idani, Bardiya Daneshvar, Sina Movahed, Mahdi Gholami, Amirreza Pourramazanali, Reza Movahedi, Arash Tahbaz, Arian Gholami, Seyed Khalil Mousavi and Artin Ashraf.

China continues to dominate the women's world rankings, with Hou Yifan leading on 2596. She is followed by compatriots Zhu Jiner in second place with 2578 and Li Tingjie in third on 2566. Iran's young talents have also held their positions in the world junior standard rankings. Daneshvar, rated 2597, remains 17th for the second consecutive month, while Movahed, on 2596, stays 18th. Reza Mahdavi dropped three places to 59th, while Ashraf remained unchanged in 76th position.

In the girls' junior standard category, Melika Mohammadi slipped one place to 12th with a rating of 2342, while Sara Da-



● Parham Maqsoudlou (l) and Seyed Mohammad-Amin Tabatabaei have remained the top two Iranian grandmasters in the FIDE World Rankings for the month of February. IRNA

vari climbed one spot to 40th on 2250.

In the women's national rankings, Mohammadi tops the list,

followed by Mobina Alinasab, Davari, Anahita Zahedifar, Dorsa Mohammad-Ebrahimkhan, Mitra Asgharzadeh, Tannaz Azali,



Rosha Akbari, Rezvaneh Haddadi and Zahra Parvin.

Iran, meanwhile, has retained

its global position, remaining 17th in the latest FIDE national rankings with an average rating of 2572, unchanged from the previous month.

Mansourian continues impressive run with Al Talaba in Iraqi league

Sports Desk

Iranian head coach Alireza Mansourian continued his impressive



● VARZESH

start in the Iraq Stars League as his Al Talaba side defeated Al Gharraf 3-1 at home in the latest round of top-flight fixtures on Sat-

urday. Zaid Ismael gave Mansourian's side an early lead in the ninth minute at Al Talaba Stadium, before Nigerian midfielder Kingsley Kuku drew the visitors level from the penalty spot deep into first-half stoppage time.

Habib Oueslati restored the hosts' advantage 10 minutes after the restart, with Saif Rasheed adding the third goal six minutes later.

The victory lifted Al Talaba – which had managed just three wins in seven matches before Mansourian's appointment last November – to fifth in the league table with 30 points from 16 games, three points adrift of leaders Al Karma. The result marked Mansourian's sixth win in nine matches in charge, with his only defeat coming in a 2-1 home setback against Al Mina's SC a fortnight ago.

Iranians bag double gold at Sri Lanka Junior Squash Open

Sports Desk

Iranians collected three medals, including two golds, on the final day of the Sri Lanka Junior Squash Open 2026, part of the Asian Junior Super Series, on Sunday.

Tiana Tourani came from behind to defeat host-nation opponent Chanumi Thebawena 3-2 (11-9, 6-11, 7-11, 11-8, 11-7) to claim the title in the girls' under-15 category, while Yousef Qorashi overcame Pakistan's Abdul Aahad Butt by the same scoreline (11-4, 4-11, 11-6, 5-11, 11-6) in the boys' under-17 final.

Amir Alvansaz, meanwhile, settled for a runner-up finish in the boys' under-15 category after a 3-0 loss (11-6, 11-4, 11-2) to Indian Shreshtha Iyer in the final.



● Tiana Tourani (l) won the girls' under-15 title at the Sri Lanka Junior Squash Open 2026. MNA

Restoration of Russian Castle on Ashuradeh Island kicks off

Iranica Desk

As part of efforts to develop tourism infrastructure and attract domestic and foreign investment, restoration and renovation work has begun on the historic Russian Castle on Ashuradeh Island, Golestan Province, with the aim of introducing the area as one of northern Iran's major tourism hubs. Thanks to its unique geographical position and rich natural and historical assets, Ashuradeh Island has long been considered one of the province's key tourist destinations. With the allocation of new funding and plans for investor participation, fresh prospects have emerged to transform the island into an international tourism site, chtn.ir wrote. Fereydoun Fa'ali, Director General of Golestan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, outlined details of the project, stat-

ing that restoration of the Russian Castle marks the first phase of development on the island. Fa'ali said efforts are underway to complete this initial phase by the Nowruz holidays, allowing tourists to visit the island under improved conditions.

Addressing investment opportunities, he noted that the Iran Tourism Development Company has announced its readiness to introduce investors for the 22-hectare Ashuradeh Island site, describing the initiative as a significant step toward attracting both domestic and foreign investment to Golestan's tourism sector.

Fa'ali also referred to other cultural heritage projects underway in the province, noting that despite numerous challenges, the dossier for the global registration of the historic Great Wall of Gorgan has been completed and submitted.

Additionally, he announced plans to inaugurate the first

phase a rural museum during the upcoming Nowruz holidays. He further referred to the restoration of Qaleh-Jigh (Jigh Castle), adding that funding has been allocated on two occasions for the revival of the castle and parts of its surrounding historic wall.

With its pristine landscapes, rich history, and ongoing development projects, Ashuradeh Island is set to emerge as a cultural and eco-tourism hotspot, offering visitors a rare opportunity to explore northern Iran's heritage while enjoying the island's scenic beauty and growing hospitality facilities.

As restoration and development continue, Ashuradeh Island is expected to become a model for sustainable tourism in Golestan Province, combining preservation of historical sites with modern visitor facilities. Authorities envision the island not only as a destination for sightseeing but also as a hub for cultural events, eco-tourism,



and investment-driven projects, creating new opportunities for local communities while showcasing the rich heritage and natural beauty of northern Iran to the world. chtin.ir

Winter migration brings thousands of flamingos to Hormozgan shores

Iranica Desk

The deputy head of Hormozgan Province's Department of Environmental Protection said the presence of more than 2,000 flamingos along the province's coastline is a clear indicator of ecosystem health and represents a valuable opportunity for nature-based tourism development in the region. Meisam Qasemi outlined the province's unique environmental characteristics, stating that Hormozgan,

with a coastline stretching more than 2,000 kilometers, numerous coastal wetlands, and extensive mangrove forests, provides an ideal habitat for a wide range of migratory bird species, particularly the visually striking flamingos, mehrnews.com wrote. He noted that the migration of these birds begins in late November and continues through the end of winter. According to Qasemi, the availability of tidal coastal areas and food-rich wetlands allows flamin-

gos to endure the colder months while restoring their energy reserves in preparation for their spring migration. Commenting on the environmental and social impact of the flamingos' presence, Qasemi said that watching these birds during the cool morning hours in the provincial capital city of Bandar Abbas not only reflects the vitality and stability of the local ecosystem, but also contributes positively to public morale and enhances the city's appeal for tourists

and nature lovers. Providing statistical data from last year's mid-winter bird census, he added that more than 2,000 flamingos were recorded across the coastal zones and wetlands of Hormozgan Province. Of this total, at least 230 flamingos were observed along the coastline of Bandar Abbas, particularly within the areas surrounding Dolat and Velayat parks, highlighting the importance of these urban coastal spaces as seasonal wildlife habitats.



IRNA

Ancient Zarch Qanat sustains life in Iran's central plateau

Iranica Desk

Located in the heart of Iran's central plateau, Yazd Province has long struggled with chronic water scarcity. Despite the region's harsh climate and limited natural water resources, earlier generations succeeded in developing sustainable and innovative water-management systems grounded in indigenous knowledge, creativity, and a deep understanding of the natural environment. Among the most remarkable and enduring examples of this legacy is the Zarch Qanat, which stands as a testament to human ingenuity in adapting to arid conditions. For centuries, the Zarch Qanat has played a vital and continuous role in supplying drinking water, supporting agricultural activities, and shaping the development of human settlements throughout the region. Extending more than 100 kilometers in length and comprising 2,115 wells, it is recognized as the oldest and longest qanat in the world. Historical evidence indicates that the qanat has been in

use for over 3,000 years, underscoring its exceptional durability and importance in Iran's water heritage, IRNA reported. Beyond its impressive scale, the Zarch Qanat represents a living cultural heritage rather than merely a hydraulic structure. Its extensive underground channels, numerous vertical wells, precise water-guidance techniques, and careful preservation of the land's natural

slope all point to a high level of engineering knowledge and advanced planning. These achievements were realized without modern technology, relying solely on accumulated experience, observation, and traditional calculations passed down through generations. One of the distinctive architectural features of the Zarch Qanat is its square cross-section, a characteristic that dates back

to the Zoroastrian era. Until approximately five decades ago, the qanat discharged more than 150 liters of water per second, providing a reliable source of water for surrounding communities. In recent years, however, uncontrolled drilling of deep and semi-deep wells within the qanat's water protection zone has caused a significant and alarming decline in its water flow.

The outlet of the Zarch Qanat is

located in the city of Zarch and consists of three separate underground branches. At present, only the saline branch, with a total length of 72 kilometers, remains active. While the discharge rate of this branch reaches about 60 liters per second in the upper reaches of the qanat, it decreases to approximately 28 liters per second by the time the water reaches the outlet. Experts and cultural heritage

specialists believe that the Zarch Qanat holds considerable potential to be promoted as a major historical and scientific tourist attraction in Yazd Province. With its ability to attract domestic and international tourists, researchers, and enthusiasts of history, architecture, and environmental studies, proper introduction and management of the site could play an important role in developing sustainable tourism, increasing public awareness, and ensuring the long-term preservation of this valuable heritage. Yazd Province, home to numerous mosques, shrines, Husseiniyehs, important Zoroastrian pilgrimage sites, historic houses, water reservoirs, historic gardens, windcatchers, and traditional bazaars, is widely regarded as a rich treasury of Iranian art, culture, and civilization. Within this unique cultural landscape, the Zarch Qanat remains one of the province's most compelling symbols of human resilience, wisdom, and creativity in confronting the challenges of desert life.



IRNA

From long shot of 'Casablanca' to Bogart's close-up at Fajr Int'l Theater Festival

By Alireza Sepahvand
Journalist
**INTERVIEW
EXCLUSIVE**

On Monday, January 26, the fifth day of the 44th Fajr International Theater Festival, audiences gathered to witness 'Casablanca,' one of the event's competitive productions. Presented as part of this year's official selection, the play revisits the legendary cinematic classic originally directed by Michael Curtiz and immortalized by the iconic performances of Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman. This stage adaptation is directed by Shima Mohammadi, who brings a contemporary theatrical vision to the timeless narrative. Born in 1988, Shima Mohammadi is an actress and director whose artistic career began at the age of 17 with the T-Art group under the guidance of Davoud Bani Ardalan. Over the years, she has built a diverse and substantial body of work across theater, film, and television. She is the founder and manager of the House of Color, Pen, and Creativity and also the founder and director of the Nika Performing Arts Institute, operating under the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance.

Mohammadi's screen appearances include the role of Azadeh Pakbaz in the acclaimed series 'King of Ear' directed by Davoud Mirbagheri; Mahgol in Mirbagheri's epic series 'Salman the Persian'; and performances in the series 'Tweezers' directed by Hossein Tabrizi. Her film credits include 'Just Arrived' directed by Kamran Qadakchian; 'Believe Me,' in which she played two leading roles under the direction of the late Mohammad Hosseini Pour; 'Bodyless,' produced by Mostafa Ahmadi; and 'Ordibehesht,' directed by Mohammad Davoudi, currently screening at the 44th Fajr Film Festival. Additional feature films in her repertoire include 'An Ending for One Night' and 'A Canopy of Nothing.' On stage, she has appeared in productions such as 'The Suicide Shop' and the staged reading 'The Trial of a Corpse,' performed alongside prominent Iranian dubbing masters including Nasrollah Medqalchi and Touraj Nasr, as well as Amin Zendegani, Ezzatollah Ramazani Far, and Arsalan Qasemi, at Nazarzadeh Hall under the direction of Abolfazl Hamrah. As a director, her theatrical work includes 'Shah Pari,' in which she also performed. Now, as the director of 'Casablanca,' Mohammadi brings her latest production to the stage of Hafez Hall as part of the competitive section of the 44th edition of the festival. On this occasion, we spoke with her about the performance and her artistic approach. The full text of the interview follows:

What motivated you to adapt 'Casablanca' for the stage, and why now?

For me, 'Casablanca' exists at an explosive intersection of love and gunpowder. The DNA of this work is built from a romance intertwined with conflict, where intimacy collides with history. I have never experienced it merely as a film, but rather as a narrative of a decisive human moment: The moment of choice.

I was tempted to detach this narrative from the silver screen and transfer it to a breathing stage, where sweat, sound, and the actor's presence make that moment of decision unavoidable and immediate. Theater allows this crossroads between love and duty to unfold in a living "now," directly before the audience's eyes.

In an era when choosing, morally, emotionally, and politically, has become one of the most difficult acts, returning to 'Casablanca' was, for me, a personal and artistic search for meaning. This story reminds us that neutrality itself is a form of decision, and that humanity is often defined by what we are willing to sacrifice.

How did you translate a cinematic narrative so deeply dependent on close-ups and atmosphere into the language of theater?

Cinema injects emotion directly into the viewer's gaze through close-ups, an instrument theater lacks. Instead of resisting this limitation, I embraced it. We replaced the camera with formalized movement, rhythm, and music, elements that can reach the same emotional depth through different paths. What the close-up accomplishes visually, we attempted to express through body and voice. I often describe this process as a kind of "radiology of the soul": Instead of zooming in with a camera lens, we used movement design, tempo, and melody to penetrate the hidden layers of the psyche.

Another challenge was the powerful visual memory tied to the film and its iconic performances. We consciously chose not to imitate those images. Instead, we translated the atmosphere, longing, suspense, and suspended time, into the language of space, light, and the raw presence of the actor. The goal was not comparison, but the creation of a fresh sensory encounter.

Did you consciously try to distance yourself from the original film, or was dialogue with the classic work important to you?

Our relationship with the original film was a passionate dialogue, neither rejection nor reproduction. The shadow of Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman is undeniable, but imitating them would have reduced the work to nostalgia.

Our focus was on stripping away Hollywood mythology to arrive at something more fragile and human. On stage, the characters

are no longer cinematic icons, they are human beings who walk in real time, hesitate, breathe, and suffer. The actors became a bridge between past and present, transforming familiar faces into living bodies with immediate emotional stakes. From this perspective, distancing ourselves from the film was not an act of opposition, but an act of honesty. Theater prefers truth over perfection.

How does 'Casablanca' resonate with contemporary Iranian audiences, particularly in relation to love, exile, and choice?

For Iranian audiences, 'Casablanca' is not merely a classic film; it is a state of mind. Themes such as exile, separation, suspended futures, and moral responsibility are deeply rooted in our collective experience. Our adaptation emphasizes the concept of patriotism, not as a slogan, but as an ethical burden. There are moments when love, however sacred, must confront a greater responsibility toward land, people, and history. This is not a negation of love, but its transformation into something broader and more painful.

At its core, the play is about staying and choosing amid chaos. It asks whether love can endure without betraying one's roots, and whether sacrifice can still carry meaning in a world worn down by loss. These questions resonate with particular intensity for Iranian audiences today.

As a director working within international festival frameworks, what do you hope non-Iranian audiences will take away from this work about Iranian theater?

I want international audiences to see Iranian theater as a living laboratory of courage and resilience. We are not passive consumers of global classics; we break them apart and reconstruct them through our own cultural struggles and ethical questions.

Despite limitations, Iranian theater speaks about humanity through form, music, and the actor's body, not through technological spectacle. This production shows how global stories can be re-created through local pain, memory, and resistance.

Ultimately, I hope audiences realize that beneath political borders, there exists a shared DNA: Love, land, sacrifice, and the eternal burden of choice. Iranian theater does not seek pity, it seeks to be understood as an equal voice in the global conversation about what it means to remain human.

When confronting a work with such a strong visual memory in the audience's mind, what was the greatest challenge in recreating it for the stage?

The main challenge was that cinema places emotion directly into the viewer's eye through close-ups and tight framing, but theater lacks this tool. To compensate for the absence of these tangible frames, I used



"formal movement" and the "magic of music" as primary ingredients. We tried to convey that emotional intensity, which in the film could be understood through a single enlarged look, here through the language of the body and melody. This is a kind of "radiology of the soul" on stage; where instead of a camera lens, we use movement and sound to penetrate the hidden layers of human beings.

At the same time, our greatest challenge was distancing ourselves from the heavy shadow of Bogart and Bergman. The audience enters the theatre with a preconceived expectation; we did not attempt to copy those images, but rather to translate the atmosphere of longing and suspense into the language of space, light, and the living presence of the actor, so that the spectator encounters a new visual and sensory experience instead of making comparisons.

What impact did the presence of well-known theater actors have on the rehearsal process and the shaping of the final performance? Which actors are collaborating with you on this project?

The actors of this production are the surgeons of the soul of this story. With their flesh and bones, they breathed life into these dead notes. Theater without such whole-hearted collaboration is nothing more than a cold script on paper. With their presence, rehearsals turned into a battlefield of emotions to reach the most authentic possible feeling and to fill the physical distance from the audience with the energy of their presence.

Our professional actors brought not only technique, but a deep understanding of the underlying layers of the text. They gave flesh and skin to the characters and helped me move away from Hollywood clichés toward "human beings" who walk on stage, breathe, and suffer.

How does the Fajr theater festival differ

from a public run for you, and how much was 'Casablanca' designed with the festival atmosphere in mind?

For us, the festival is like Casablanca's own "transit," a place to be seen and to pass through. We surgically adapted 'Casablanca' for the festival so that it would align with the fast pulse of our present moment. The use of form and music within this competitive context helped us find a more universal language for telling our story. The Fajr festival, despite all the hardships and issues of these days, is a platform where theater, as a living current, finds a different kind of feedback and rhythm. With its epic yet deeply internal structure, 'Casablanca' is designed precisely for such a space, one in which the professional theater audience expects to see a bold reinterpretation of enduring works.

If you were to highlight one central concern or message of this production for today's Iranian audience, what would it be?

Love and war are two sides of the same coin. In a world that smells of despair, sacrifice is still possible. I want to tell today's weary audience that even if you are trapped in 'Casablanca' (or anywhere in the world), it is still humanity that ultimately prevails. Love is the only path to salvation from the ruins of our inner and outer wars.

But another key message we extracted from this work is the lofty concept of love even for the "homeland." As we see in the film, sometimes for a greater ideal and for the salvation of land and country, one must give up the dearest personal attachments. I want to emphasize that "loyalty to one's roots" always prevails. Love is the only salvation, but a love in which homeland and lofty human ideals are not forgotten; just like Rick, who ultimately, through that great decision and sacrifice, gives up his personal love. For me, the core message of this production is the concept of "staying and choosing" in the midst of chaos.

Iran vows overhaul of heritage protection force, linking cultural assets to national identity

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts said safeguarding historical assets was tantamount to protecting the country's national identity, ordering a nationwide upgrade of facilities, logistics and manpower for the ministry's protection force. Speaking during a visit to the Protection Unit headquarters at the Saadabad cultural and historical

complex in northern Tehran, Reza Salehi-Amiri said the unit stood "on the front line" of preserving Iran's civilizational capital, IRNA reported.

He issued instructions for all dormitory equipment used by conscripted soldiers in provincial units to be fully renovated and standardized next year, following recent upgrades at Saadabad, Niavaran, Golestan Palace and the National Museum of Iran.

Salehi-Amiri, on his third inspection of the Saadabad complex, also toured the Royal Tableware Museum and met unit personnel. "The issues and demands raised were formally recorded and will be followed up," he said, stressing an ethics-centered approach to human resource management. The unit's mission, he added, included boosting staffing capacity, meeting organizational needs and addressing the human, psy-

chological and family concerns of its forces.

He announced a comprehensive program to reinforce the unit's structure, improve livelihoods and enhance logistical capabilities nationwide.

"Hills, monuments, museums and historical sites are the identity card and historical memory of the Iranian nation," Salehi-Amiri said. "Iran without cultural heritage would be stripped of its historical

and identity links."

Protection Unit commander Ayat Ahmadi presented an operational assessment and outlined priority needs. Salehi-Amiri said all items were reviewed under a "problem-oriented, program-driven and results-focused" approach, with directives issued for implementation.

Key areas discussed included strengthening logistical infrastructure, supplying specialized

equipment, improving welfare conditions, expanding human resources and upgrading operational capacity.

Officials also addressed recruitment, securing conscript allocations from the armed forces general staff, and bolstering the unit's vehicle and motorcycle fleet to improve monitoring and protection of historical buildings and archaeological sites across the country.