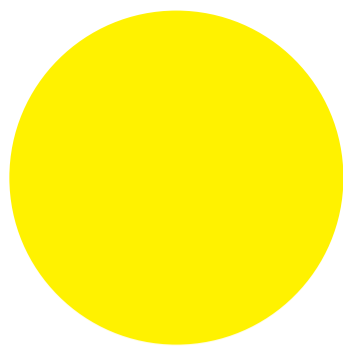


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Iran's trump card in war

By Edris Khosravi
Expert on international relations

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

In simple terms, geopolitics refers to the influence of a country's geography on its policymaking. This concept goes beyond political geography — it also encompasses human, economic, cultural, natural resource, and technological factors.

However, geopolitical advantages are not necessarily permanent. Technological developments, such as navigation, missile and nuclear weapons, the rise or decline of trade routes, fluctuations in the use of certain natural resources, and the formation or collapse of alliances, all influence a country's geopolitical position. Therefore, while the geography of regions remains largely constant, geopolitical advantages and challenges evolve through the interaction of geography, government decisions, and technological progress.

Although Iran enjoys strong geopolitical advantages, it faces serious threats for two main reasons:

1. The Iranian government's neglect of the steadily declining importance of geopolitical and ideological factors in favor of the growing significance of geo-economic ones.

2. A lack of pragmatism and flexibility needed to adapt to the shifts shaping the regional and global geopolitical order.

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Martyred security chief, Basij commander, sailors glide over shoulders to eternal abode



The coffin of Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Larijani is seen during a funeral ceremony held in Tehran, Iran, on March 18, 2026.

National Desk

A funeral ceremony was held on Wednesday for Iran's top security official, commander of Basij force as well as scores of Iranian sailors martyred in the ongoing aggression by the US and the Israeli regime against Iran. Thousands of Iranians from all walks of life gathered in Tehran's iconic Enqelab Square to bid farewell to the victims of the crimes committed by the US and Israel against Iran.

The Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Larijani along with his son

were killed in an Israeli airstrike in Tehran on March 17. The Commander of the Basij Force, Major General Gholam Reza Soleimani, was also killed in separate airstrike by the Israeli regime in Tehran.

The funeral was also held for 84 crew members of Iran's Dena destroyer which was targeted by a US submarine on March 4 while returning from the MILAN 2026 Naval Exercise in India.

The attack on the destroyer claimed the lives of 104 crew members. The bodies of 84 sailors have been returned to

the country while 20 others still remain missing.

The strike, which was carried out hundreds of miles away from the war zone, also injured 32 others who were transferred to a hospital in Sri Lanka for medical treatment.

Messages of condolences

Messages of condolences from Iranian officials were poured in following the martyrdom of Ali Larijani.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian in a message on Wednesday extended his condolences over the martyrdom of

Larijani and expressed his deep sorrow over his martyrdom.

Pezeshkian vowed "severe revenge" for the "terrorist criminals" who committed the crimes against the Iranian people.

Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said future generations will remember Ali Larijani as a man who spent all his life defending the Islamic Revolution and Iran.

"Certainly, the struggles and bravery of this steadfast soldier of the Leader of the Revolution and the great Iranian nation will always remain in our collective memory," Qalibaf said in

a message on Wednesday.

Iran's Judiciary Chief Gholam-Hossein Mohseni Ejei also expressed condolences over the martyrdom of Larijani, describing him as a dedicated servant of the Islamic Revolution.

The chief commander of the Iranian Army Major General Amir Hatami also vowed a decisive response to the killing of Larijani.

He said the assassination of Larijani will never undermine the will of the "great Iranian nation in safeguarding the independence, freedom and Iran's territorial integrity".



IRGC batters 100 Israeli sites in fresh strikes; Tel Aviv left in blackout

Navy targets occupying regime's naval fleet, forces US warship to retreat

International Desk

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) launched on Wednesday the 61st wave of Operation True Promise 4 to avenge the blood of Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Larijani by targeting the Israeli positions in the occupied territories. In a statement released early in the day, the IRGC announced that Tel Aviv, center of the Israeli evil acts, was targeted by Khorramshahr-4, Qadr, Emad, and Kheibarshakan missiles. Due to the damage to Israeli modern and multilayer defence system, the Iranian missiles easily targeted more than 100 military and security bases in the occupied territories. The IRGC attacks resulted in

blackout in Tel Aviv and caused 230 killed and injured.

"The pure blood of this high-ranking martyr, like other dear martyrs, will be a source of pride, strength, and national awakening in the face of the global arrogance front and international Zionism," the IRGC said of Larijani, who was assassinated in a US-Israeli air raid on Tuesday. "Undoubtedly, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps will never forget the blood vengeance of this most honorable martyr and other martyrs of the sacred defense."

Get away from oil, gas facilities in Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar

The IRGC also issued a warning that it would strike different oil and gas facilities in Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar after an



● ISNA

attack on Iran's South Pars gas fields.

These facilities have become legitimate targets, the IRGC said, calling on citizens, residents and personnel of those facilities to immediately evacuate to safer places.

Moreover, Navy Commander

Rear Admiral Shahram Irani said that Iran severely targeted the naval fleet of the Israeli regime on Wednesday in retaliation of US and Israeli aggression on Dena destroyer.

Stressing that the two terrorist regimes of US and Israel breached the international law

in their heinous aggression against Iran's Dena destroyer, he said the destroyer had finished its naval mission with the aim of establishing peace and security at seas and oceans.

Iran's Navy Force will give a crushing response to any enemies' provocations and movements at the Sea of Oman and its borders, Irani emphasized. "We will never allow enemy to approach the Sea of Oman and also the Iranian borders."

The Navy also announced in a statement that in response to the heinous crimes committed by the United States, the force fired missiles towards the world's largest warship -- USS Abraham Lincoln -- concurrent with the funeral ceremony of 84 martyred sailors of Dena destroyer, and forced the warship to leave the region.

The US and the Israeli regime launched their joint military aggression on Iran on February 28, following their previous war against the country in June last year. Both conflicts were launched as Tehran was in the midst of diplomatic talks with Washington over its peaceful nuclear program. Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei was assassinated in an Israeli airstrike targeting his residence and office in Tehran on the first day of the ongoing aggression.

In response, Iran has carried out targeted, proportionate self-defense strikes against Israeli positions and US regional bases, promising that its counterattacks will continue as long as the two regimes keep up their war of aggression.

FIFA confirms Iran World Cup venues unchanged

Sports Desk

FIFA, the world football federation, has officially announced that the schedule for the Iranian national football team's matches in the 2026 World Cup will not undergo any changes.

Over the past few days, following a message from US President Donald Trump on his social media regarding Iran's national team's participation in the World Cup, the Football Federation of Iran requested that the venue for the national team's matches be changed from the USA to Mexico, to avoid any issues for the players and team members, according to varzesh3.com. The matter of transferring Iran's matches from the United States to Mexico was a request that had existed for some time, but Trump's threatening message turned this issue into a serious concern.

In this connection, when Claudia Sheinbaum, President of Mexico, was asked whether Mexico would welcome host-



● varzesh3.com

ing Iran's matches in the 2026 World Cup on its soil, she replied, "Yes," and added, "Mexico has diplomatic relations with all countries in the world. We will therefore await FIFA's decision on this matter."

Finally, FIFA officially announced this decision through a brief statement on its official X (formerly Twitter) page:

Following recent reports, the following update can be attributed to a FIFA spokesperson:

"FIFA is in regular contact with all participating member associations, including IR

Iran, to discuss the planning for the FIFA World Cup 2026. FIFA is looking forward to all participating teams as per the match schedule announced on December 6, 2025."

The national team must now prepare to travel to the US. However, it remains unclear which players and coaching staff members will ultimately be granted visas by the US government.

The Iranian national team is grouped with Belgium, Egypt, and New Zealand in the 2026 World Cup.

Data: Free zone foreign investment value soars 531%, realized investment up 268%

Economy Desk

The value of foreign investment projects in Iran's free trade zones rose by 531% in the first 11 months of the year, which began on March 21, 2025, while realized foreign investment grew by 268%, according to statistics released by the Ministry of Economy and Finance.

According to Tasnim news agency, the ministry announced that during this period, attracted domestic investment in free zones also increased by 125%, and realized domestic investment grew by 36%. Additionally, exports from free zones rose by 14%, and the value of production in these regions increased by 28%. The Ministry of Economy emphasized that despite the US-Israeli attacks that began on Feb. 28, it is striving to maintain economic stability and supply the country's essential needs by maintaining a constant presence alongside the people and economic actors.

According to the announcement, the Foreign Investment Board



● IRNA

held 13 sessions throughout the year, resulting in the approval of nearly 650 applications from foreign investment applicants, foreign investors, joint companies, and Iranian contracting parties, worth \$17 billion.

With the entry of the aforementioned foreign capital into the country — part of which has become operational and imported — a significant portion of the financial resources required for economic enterprises and development and infrastructure

projects in the country has been supplied, playing a major role in the country's construction and development.

The announced figure of \$17 billion includes approved projects but does not signify the realization of this amount of investment. In reality, this figure is equivalent to the value of projects proposed by foreign investors and Iranians living abroad, and only a portion of this amount has actually entered the projects so far.

Iran's trump card ...

Despite Iran's central position at the junction of three continents — potentially making it the heart of global transit — its presence in the seven major trade routes that have emerged over the past couple of decades to connect East-West and North-South has been minimal. Nearly all of these routes bypass Iran.

In the China-Europe "Silk Road" corridor, the main consideration is using Iran's Caspian Sea maritime route. The International North-South Transport Corridor, planned to run through Iran, still suffers from incomplete railway links — specifically the Chabahar-Zahedan and Rasht-Astara lines. The practical exclusion of Iran from trade corridors — despite Iranian routes be-

ing shorter and cheaper — illustrates how the country's geopolitical position remains underutilized. The same trend is evident in other domains, especially in the Persian Gulf, where Iran's geopolitical edge is fading.

Robert Kaplan, in his seminal book *The Revenge of Geography*, notes that all the oil of Greater Middle East lies either south or north of Iran, placing Iran in the best position for the transit and oversight of energy routes.

Iran possesses unique geopolitical advantages in the Persian Gulf as well. Four Iranian islands along the northern belt of the Strait of Hormuz grant Iran strategic oversight over this vital waterway. Iran has the longest coastline along the Persian Gulf, the deepest waters near its shores, and the marine

traffic separation lines at the western exit of the Strait of Hormuz inevitably pass near six Iranian islands. Furthermore, with over 500 kilometers of coastline along the Sea of Oman and the Arabian Sea — and with Chabahar Port on its shores — Iran offers the most suitable access route for Central Asian countries to open seas.

Now that Iran is under attack by the United States and Israel, it is leveraging the Strait of Hormuz — this chokepoint of global energy transit — well to exert pressure on other countries and seize the initiative in the conflict. Therefore, it can be said that even with technological advancements, geopolitical features will continue to be a critical element of national power for centuries to come.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

