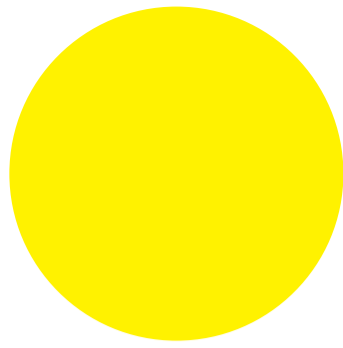


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The photo shows portraits of teachers and pupils killed in a US strike on Shajarah Tayyebah elementary school in Minab, southern Iran. The airstrike claimed the life of 168 people, including 26 teachers and 120 schoolchildren, on February 28, 2026.

AP

UAE exit from OPEC unlikely to move oil markets in long term

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

The United Arab Emirates' exit from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) could be seen as one of the most significant recent developments in the global energy market, with the potential to shift the balance of power within the organization and influence oil pricing trends. At the same time, regional geopolitical dynamics and the fallout from ongoing conflict in the region have further added to the complexity of the situation. Amin Noorbakhsh, an oil market expert, told Iran Daily that the decision would have no immediate impact on global oil markets and would be unlikely to bring



Amin Noorbakhsh

about any substantial change in the long term, though expected to yield benefits for the UAE.

IRAN DAILY: What political factors led the UAE to decide to leave OPEC and OPEC+?

NOORBAKHSH: Both political and economic factors were involved. From a political standpoint, Israel appears to have had an influence, given that the UAE is ultimately a key regional partner of the regime. With energy being one of the areas of cooperation. The idea is that energy output from Persian Gulf countries, including the UAE, could be routed through Israel to the Mediterranean. In practical terms, oil and petroleum products would be transported via the Red Sea to the port of Eilat, and from there through an existing pipeline with a capacity of 1.2 million barrels per day to the Mediterranean port of Ashkelon.

This arrangement would not only generate economic revenues for the regime but would also help shore up its position as a regional entity. Its primary advantage lies in the fact that when UAE energy is exported through this route, the stability of that territory—namely Israel—becomes directly linked to the energy security of multiple countries. As such, the regime is expected to actively pursue this pathway. Given recent developments in the Strait of Hormuz, the UAE is likely to have stronger incentives to follow through on this option. For the United States, increased oil supply in global markets enhances its ability to control prices, making this development favorable from Washington's perspective. It is therefore likely that the US has supported—or even encouraged—the UAE in this direction. Another contributing factor is the UAE's disagreement with Saudi Arabia. This has been evident in past OPEC decisions,

where the UAE consistently sought higher production quotas but was typically granted lower levels. From an economic standpoint, capital flight and declining exports due to disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz have also played a role. The UAE is likely seeking to offset these pressures by increasing oil exports, especially with oil prices rising.

Given the consequences of the Iran war and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, how will global oil markets react in the long term once this decision is implemented?

In the short term there will be no impact on the market. As long as the Strait of Hormuz remains closed and Iran continues to impose restrictions, countries that rely on the strait for exports will face constraints. Even at current production levels, the UAE is unable to export all its output, meaning it must either store surplus oil or scale

back production. The UAE has a production capacity of around 4 million barrels per day for oil and condensates. Using 2025 as a reference, its average output stood at approximately 3.4 million barrels per day, meaning about 600,000 barrels per day of capacity remained unused due to OPEC quotas. The country also plans to increase its capacity by an additional one million barrels per day over the next one to two years, bringing total capacity to 5 million barrels per day. Although exiting OPEC is a process rather than an instantaneous move, once completed, the UAE could add 600,000 to 700,000 barrels per day to its production, most of which would likely be directed toward exports. Its exports last year stood at around 2.6 to 2.7 million barrels per day, and this figure could potentially rise to about 3.4 million barrels per day.

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Leader vows national victory in cultural, economic fronts beyond battlefield

President casts Minab tragedy as assault on Iran's development path

International Desk

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution vowed that the Iranian nation will defeat the enemy in the cultural and economic spheres as well, following the victory on the military battlefield.

Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei made the remarks in a Friday message on the occasion of Teacher's Day and Labor Day.

"Now that the Islamic Republic of Iran, after more than forty-seven years of struggle, relying on divine grace, has proven to the world a part of its remarkable capability in the military battle against the enemies of its progress and excellence, it must also disappoint and defeat them in the phase of economic and cultural jihad," he wrote. "Teachers will be the most influential link in the cultural battle, and workers will be among the most effective elements in the economic battle — so

much so that it can be claimed that these two serve as the backbone of the arenas of culture and economy," he said.

On May 2, Iran marked National Teachers' Day, which coincides with the martyrdom anniversary of legendary Iranian scholar Ayatollah Morteza Mutahhari. Meanwhile, International Workers' Day, also known as May Day, is marked on May 1 every year.

Ayatollah Khamenei noted that the country's progress hinges on "the twin pillars of knowledge and labor," and called for practical support for both groups.

Teachers, he said, carry the "grave responsibility" of teaching skills, nurturing insight, and shaping the identity of the next generation. "Students will reflect, like a mirror, the behaviors and words of their teachers," he added. Turning to workers, the Leader described the workplace as an arena "as



The photo shows portraits of Iranian teachers killed in a US attack on the Shajareh Tayyebeh school in the southern city of Minab on February 28, 2026.

wide as the country itself." He said hard work and commitment are the "pillars of any great success."

President Masoud Pezeshkian also in a message on the occasion of Teacher's Day said achieving educational justice depends on serious attention to teachers' livelihoods, professional conditions, and social status.

The president also praised the resilience of Iran's cultural and educational community in the face of recent threats and aggressions.

Pezeshkian also said meaningful progress would not be possible without improving teachers' economic conditions. Referring to the US deadly attack on the Shajareh Tayyebeh school in south-



ern city of Minab, Pezeshkian called it a tragic example of enemies targeting the most innocent members of society and an assault on Iran's path of development.

At least 168 people including students, their parents and teachers, were killed in the attack by the US on the school on the first day of the US-Israeli aggression against Iran on February 28.

Renewed war 'probable' as US fails to uphold commitments: *Iranian cmdr.*

International Desk

A senior Iranian military officer said on Saturday that renewed fighting with the US was "likely", hours after President Donald Trump said he was not satisfied with an Iranian negotiating proposal.

"A renewed conflict between Iran and the US is probable as evidence has shown that America is not committed to any promises or agreement. The actions and statements of American officials are mostly made for the use in media in order to prevent a drop in oil price and to exit the quagmire they created themselves," Deputy for Inspection of the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters General Mohammad Jafar Asadi said.

Asadi also clarified Iran's response to any renewed adventure by the US, saying that the country's Armed Forces are in full readiness to confront any hostile action.

His remarks came after Iran delivered the new proposal to mediator Pakistan on Thursday evening, which was not welcomed by the US presi-



The photo shows a US Air Force E-3G Sentry aircraft sitting in ruins at Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia after an Iranian missile and drone strike.

● GETTY IMAGES



dent. "At this moment I'm not satisfied with what they're offering," Trump told reporters.

The war, launched by the United States and Israel in late February, has been on hold since April 8, with one failed round of peace talks having taken place in Pakistan since then.

Iran's judiciary chief Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei said on Friday that his country had "never shied away from

negotiations", but would not accept an "imposition" of peace terms.

The White House has declined to provide details on the latest Iranian proposal, but news site Axios reported that US envoy Steve Witkoff had submitted amendments to a previous one putting Tehran's nuclear program back on the negotiating table. The changes reportedly include demands that Iran not move enriched uranium from bombed sites or resume activity there during talks.

News of the Iranian proposal briefly pushed oil prices down nearly five percent, though they remain about 50 percent above pre-war levels amid the ongoing closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran has maintained a stranglehold on the strait since the war began, choking off major flows of oil, gas and fertilizer to the world economy, while the United States has imposed a counter-blockade on Iranian ports. Speaking at a rally on Friday, Trump said, "We're like pirates," as he described an earlier helicopter raid on an oil tanker under the blockade.

Tehran rebukes assassination of Shia cleric near Damascus shrine

Iran strongly condemned a terrorist attack near the Sayyida Zaynab shrine south of the Syrian capital Damascus, which martyred a prominent Shia preacher.

In a statement on Saturday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei expressed deep disgust at the heinous crime on Friday, which led to the assassination of Sheikh Farhan Mansour, a member of the Shia sect's scholarly body and a Friday sermon preacher, Press TV reported.

Baqaei said acts of terror against religious sites and scholars in Syria and other countries in West Asia are part of the sinister plot of the Israeli regime and the United States to sow discord and incite division in the region.

It is imperative that all sides remain vigilant in the face of such plots and fulfill their responsibilities to decisively counter terrorism and extremism, he added.

The Iranian spokesperson emphasized the need to identify and punish the perpetrators and supporters of this terrorist crime and improve collective cooperation in the region to uproot terrorism. He extended his condolences to the family of the martyred cleric as well as the Syrian nation and the community of religious scholars.

Baqaei also reiterated the Syrian transitional government is responsible to



ensure security of the Syrian people, scholars and all ethnic and religious groups.

According to a Britain-based monitoring group, the so-called Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR), the attack occurred after Mansour left the shrine. Sources cited by SOHR said a hand grenade was thrown into his car near the Safir al-Zahra hotel.

The explosion left Mansour with "very critical injuries," and he was taken to a hospital. Security forces later imposed a strict cordon around the site of the blast, the monitor added.

The attack comes amid rising sectarian tensions in Syria since the fall of the government of former president Bashar al-Assad in late 2024. Minority communities have faced increasing violence, including targeted massacres of Alawites and deadly clashes in Druze-majority areas.

UAE exit from ...

However, even if the UAE were to immediately ramp up production to its full 4 million barrels per day, it would still be unable to export more than current levels. At present, exports are conducted through the pipeline running from Fujairah, which bypasses the Strait of Hormuz and has a maximum capacity of around 1.8 million barrels per day. This pipeline represents the UAE's effective export ceiling.

As a result, there is currently a gap of roughly one million barrels per day between export capacity and last year's export levels, forcing the UAE to cut production as storage capacity is also limited.

Looking ahead, if export constraints and tensions in the Strait of Hormuz are resolved, the UAE could bring on stream its spare capacity within a relatively short period and reach full production of 4 million barrels per day. Exports could then rise to around 3.3 to 3.4 million barrels per day. Even then, this is not a particularly large volume in global oil markets and might reduce prices by only one to two percent. In the longer term, even the addition

of another one million barrels per day would likely have a limited impact—at most around a two percent effect on prices. However, from a macroeconomic perspective, this could still be significant. Even a three to four percent shift is meaningful in economies where inflation remains below five percent. Politically, a producer that was previously constrained by OPEC quotas would now operate under US influence, effectively becoming a tool for market management.

What impact will this move have on OPEC's cohesion and its ability to manage global oil supply? Could this lead to a weakening of OPEC's role and encourage similar actions by rivals?

OPEC's functioning can be compared to what is often referred to as a "standing spectator" scenario. In a sporting event, if a few individuals stand up to watch the game, it benefits them individually. But if everyone does so, the collective outcome is worse.

A similar dynamic applies here. If a limited number of countries leave OPEC, it can be advantageous for them. OPEC continues to manage and stabi-

lize the market, while those outside the organization are free to maximize production and benefit economically and politically. However, if all members were to follow suit, a destructive competition would likely emerge, with each country striving to maximize output, ultimately driving prices down and harming them all.

The UAE's move fits this "standing spectator" analogy. Its exit is unlikely to significantly affect market prices, but by no longer adhering to OPEC constraints, it can maximize its production—especially at a time of elevated prices—and capitalize on the situation.

More broadly, OPEC has weakened in recent years. This is partly due to Saudi Arabia's alignment with the United States, and partly due to Russia's presence. Given the current state of the shale oil market, OPEC may need to make its decisions less predictable. Instead of consistently increasing supply when prices rise and cutting output when prices fall, it may need to adopt less foreseeable strategies so that competitors such as shale producers cannot easily factor in its behavior in their planning.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



China shrugs off US sanctions on Iranian crude

'Washington's unilateral bans breach int'l law, norms'

Economy Desk

China will not comply with US sanctions against five firms targeted for purchasing Iranian oil, Beijing's Commerce Ministry said on Saturday.

China's Ministry of Commerce on Saturday issued a ban prohibiting any recognition, enforcement or compliance with US sanctions imposed on five Chinese companies on the grounds of their alleged involvement in Iranian petroleum transactions, Xinhua reported.

China is a key customer for Iranian oil, mainly through independent "teapot" refineries that rely on discounted crude from the Islamic Republic.

The United States, seeking to choke off revenue to Tehran, has ramped up sanctions on such refineries, according to channelnewsasia.com.

The ministry's injunction, relating to sanctions announced separately since last year, states that the US measures "shall not be recognized, implemented, or complied with."

The sanctions "improperly prohibit or restrict Chinese enterprises from conducting normal economic, trade and



Shandong teapot refinery
Oilprice.com

related activities with third countries ... and violate international law and the

basic norms governing international relations," the ministry said in a state-

ment.

"The Chinese government has consis-

tently opposed unilateral sanctions lacking UN authorization and a basis in international law."

The injunction applies to three companies in Shandong Province - Shandong Jincheng Petrochemical Group, Shandong Shouguang Luqing Petrochemical and Shandong Shengxing Chemical - and two others based elsewhere in China, Hengli Petrochemical (Dalian) Refinery and Hebei Xinhai Chemical Group. Washington imposed on Friday sanctions on yet another Chinese firm which it said had imported "tens of millions of barrels" of Iranian crude oil, generating billions of dollars in revenue for Tehran.

The firm, Qingdao Haiye Oil Terminal, was not mentioned in the commerce ministry's injunction.

The latest sanctions come as Washington and Tehran have been locked in a diplomatic standstill, with no permanent resolution in sight for the conflict that erupted with US-Israeli strikes on Iran in late February.

US President Donald Trump is due to visit China for talks with leader Xi Jinping later this month.

Scores of ships brave US blockade in Strait of Hormuz, data shows

Economy Desk

Data analysis shows that 81 vessels crossed the Strait of Hormuz in violation of a US blockade imposed on April 13, Qatar-based Al Jazeera reported, citing maritime tracking data.

IRNA, citing Al Jazeera, reported that a total of 145 ships transited the Strait of Hormuz between April 13 and April 30, with 81 vessels — or 56% — deemed to have breached the US blockade.

Analysis of MarineTraffic data indicated that 53 of the vessels that defied the blockade were either coming from Iranian ports, heading toward them, or sailing under the Iranian flag. Eleven of those ships were also listed under US sanctions.

A further 28 vessels, also under sanctions but not directly linked to Iranian ports, crossed the strait during the same period. The data also showed that 11 ships operated by companies based in China, India, Pakistan and Turkey



IRNA

were unable to transit the waterway.

The analysis was based on tracking ships that kept their transponders active while passing through the Strait of Hormuz. It noted that some vessels switched off their transmitters before transit, suggesting the actual number of crossings could be significantly higher.

This comes as US Central Command (CENTCOM) had said the blockade would target vessels traveling to or from Iranian ports.

According to the report, the United States deployed at least 15 vessels to the Middle East, including an aircraft carrier and 11 destroyers. However, tracking data from the first 24 hours

after the blockade was imposed showed that five Iranian-flagged ships crossed the strait, along with six other vessels linked to Iranian ports.

While CENTCOM said 39 ships had altered course due to the blockade, tracking data showed that 50 vessels connected to Iranian ports still transited the strait.

Cargoes carried by ships that breached the blockade varied, including 36 cargo and container vessels, 11 bulk carriers and six oil tankers.

The highest number of such crossings was recorded on April 28, when 10 vessels passed through the strait in both directions, indicating increased Iranian-linked

traffic despite heightened US threats.

Separately, Bloomberg columnist Javier Blas said satellite imagery showed Iran continuing to load oil tankers at Kharg Island, including a very large crude carrier (VLCC), with no signs that storage capacity had been exhausted, contrary to claims by the White House. Oil prices on Thursday jumped to their highest level since 2022 after a report that the US military is set to brief President Trump on new plans for potential action in the war against Iran. Brent crude rose by nearly 7% to more than \$126 a barrel at one point before retreating. Around 20% of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas passes through the Strait of Hormuz, and the conflict has driven global energy prices higher.

Brent crude touched \$126.31 per barrel earlier in the session — its highest since Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine — before falling back to around \$114 later in the day, partly due to the expiry of futures contracts.

Industry sector pins blame on speculators for car market volatility

Economy Desk

Iran's Industry, Mine and Trade Ministry spokesperson Ezzatollah Zarei said speculators were driving volatility in the country's car market, adding that supply and import policies remained unchanged. Zarei said 160,000 tons of steel sheets had been offered to automakers, of which 70,000 tons had been purchased by applicants.

"There is turbulence in the car market caused by artificially amplifying certain issues, behind which lies profiteering," he said. "We have no problems in the auto sector. Imports and production will continue."

He added that last year's import policy remained in place with no bans, and said a number of vehicles currently held at customs would be cleared and delivered by importers within a short period.

Industry Minister Mohammad Atabak also said on Saturday that automakers should refrain from unjustified price increases, noting there were no supply constraints in steel sheets and no obstacles to reducing production. He added that issues related to import order registration had been resolved and imports were continuing.

In recent weeks, some traders in the open market have raised prices of steel-related products, including automobiles, citing alleged shortages following damage to Mobarakeh Steel's infrastructure during the US-Israeli conflict. The car prices have surged over the past weeks, with sellers



attributing the increases to a lack of steel sheets.

According to Mehr news agency, Iran's steel industry has been moving toward recovery two weeks after a 40-day war, with producers maintaining at least baseline output through crisis management and domestic capabilities.

Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC), based in the central province of Isfahan is working to restore stable production after parts of its lines were damaged during the hostilities.

Western sanctions on Iran, along with damage from recent military attacks on production infrastructure, have further intensified challenges facing the sector.

According to the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade, Mobarakeh Steel Company has also been tasked with supplying steel sheets to downstream and affiliated companies through imports at prices approved by the Organization for Supporting Consumers and Producers. The ministry is also pursuing the approach of increasing steel production capacity in the country.

Ministry seeks overseas legal experts for post-war transport, housing sectors

Economy Desk

Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadegh Malvajerd announced Saturday that her organization is recruiting Iranian lawyers and legal scholars based overseas, as well as international legal advocates who have spoken against injustices faced by Iranians, to support specialized sectors including aviation, ports, roads, rail and housing.

Speaking on the sidelines of a consultative meeting with the presidential deputy for legal affairs, Sadegh Malvajerd said the legal affairs deputy of the presidency had played an effective

role in addressing shifts in the legal framework governing the Strait of Hormuz and other issues linked to the country's wartime conditions.

Iran has tightened its control over the strategic Strait of Hormuz by collecting transit fees from vessels and depositing the revenue into the Central Bank of Iran, according to official statements. Abbas Papizadeh, a member of parliament's board, said in late April that the first revenues from ship transit fees in the strait had been transferred to the state treasury.

The country remains under wartime conditions. Tehran and Washington reached a temporary ceasefire on

April 8 through Pakistani mediation, though tensions remain high. The United States imposed a blockade on April 13 on vessels entering or leaving Iranian coastal waters to pressure Iran into a peace agreement following a 40-day conflict. The measure was later expanded to all Iranian-flagged vessels on the high seas.

Under new conditions set by Tehran, only pre-authorized commercial vessels may transit the Strait of Hormuz, while ships linked to the United States, Israel and other states designated as hostile are barred from passage.

"We intend to make use of these individuals in the specialized areas of the

Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, including air, port, road and rail transport, as well as housing," she said.

Speaking on the sidelines of a consultative meeting with the vice president for legal affairs, she said the Ministry is also looking to engage non-Iranian legal professionals who have spoken out against injustices faced by the Iranian people, to contribute in the same fields.

"We intend to make use of these individuals in the specialized areas of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, including air, port, road, rail transport and housing," she said.



Farzaneh Sadegh Malvajerd
jamaran.ir

Sadegh Malvajerd added that the vice presidency for legal affairs had played an effective role in addressing changes to the legal regime of the Strait of Hormuz and other issues related to the effects and consequences of the war.

Reasons for Europe's abstention from participation in war against Iran

PERSPECTIVE

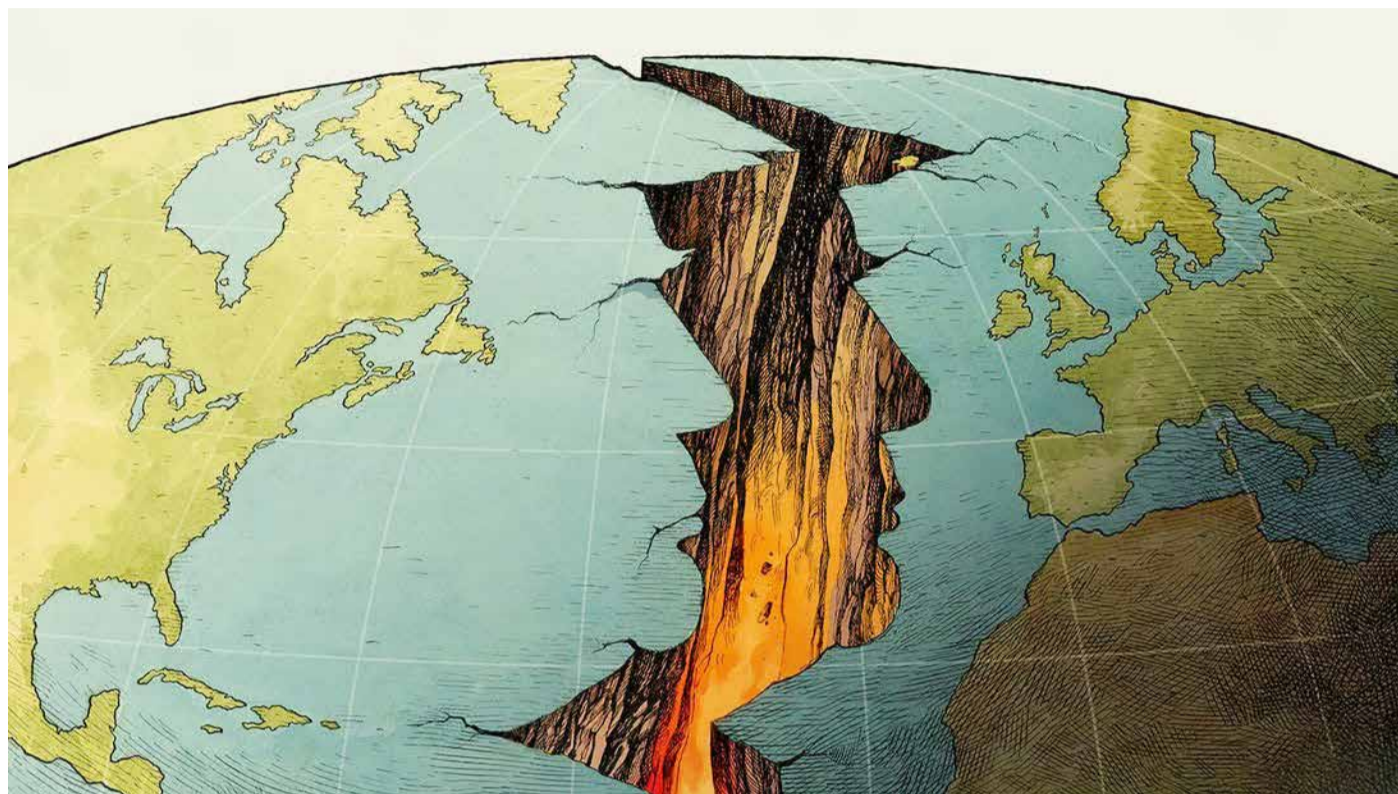
Europe's abstention from participation in the war against Iran constitutes a reflection of a profound metamorphosis within the continent's strategic, juridical, and security-related calculations. An ensemble of interconnected factors has precipitated this unprecedented posture, which shall be elucidated forthwith:

• The crisis of juridical legitimacy and the United Nations Charter

The primary factor resides in the absence of juridical legitimacy for the conflict. Europe, professing its commitment to a "rules-based international order," evaluated the military operations undertaken by the United States and the Zionist regime as devoid of legal grounds within the framework of the United Nations Charter. From the perspective of numerous European jurists, these actions exemplify an "aggressive war" for they possessed neither authorization from the Security Council nor could they be convincingly justified under the rubric of self-defense. For powers such as France and Great Britain, participation in such a conflict would signify the erosion of international credibility and the calling into question of those principles for which they had long served as advocates.

• The ominous shadow of the Greenland crisis over Transatlantic relations

At a more profound level, this abstention originates from a fissure that culminated subsequent to the Greenland Crisis. Washington's endeavor to exert pressure upon Denmark, coupled with threats of commercial reprisals against Europe, fortified the perception that the geopolitical competition under Trump's America encompasses not merely rivals but also encompasses allies. Within such an atmosphere, Washington's entreaty for accompaniment in the war was interpreted not as a collective security imperative but rather as a continuation of that same unilateralist approach.



● DAVID PARKINS/THE ECONOMIST

• Economic calculations and energy security

Europe is profoundly dependent upon the stability of the Persian Gulf, and any perturbation within this region directly precipitates an escalation in energy prices and exerts pressure upon domestic economies. The surge in petroleum prices, alongside the threat of a closure of the Strait of Hormuz, sounded the alarm regarding economic instability and social dissatisfaction. Furthermore, apprehension concerning disruptions to the supply chain of indispensable commodities — including chemical fertilizers — extended the crisis beyond energy into the realm of food security. Under such circumstances, Europe preferred that, if it could not play a stabilizing role, it would, at minimum, refrain from exacerbating the crisis.

• The strategic priority of the Eastern front and the Russian threat

From a geopolitical perspective, Europe's strategic concentration remains upon the Russian

threat. While the war in Ukraine persists and anxieties regarding the expansion of Moscow's influence endure, involvement in a novel conflict within the Middle East is perceived as a diversion of resources and a weakening of defensive capacity. Numerous European governments are concerned that such an action would, in practical terms, afford Russia a greater opportunity to attain the upper hand on the Eastern Front. This concern intensified when certain decisions emanating from Washington — including the reduction of pressure upon Russia's energy market — ultimately worked to Russia's advantage.

• Madrid's resistance and European solidarity

The resolute stance of Spain, alongside the European Union's endorsement thereof, transformed into the principal emblem of European resistance against this war. Pedro Sánchez, with the slogan "No to War," characterized the attacks as "unjustifiable" and "dangerous," and refused to authorize the utilization

of his nation's territory for these operations. This resistance, in turn, emboldened other countries to adopt a more autonomous posture.

• The marginalization of Europe within the decision-making process

One complementary factor is Europe's dissatisfaction with its exclusion from major decision-making processes concerning Iran during the Trump administration. The Trump administration, regarding the Iranian dossier, neither involved Europeans in pre-war negotiations nor consulted with European allies on the eve of the war, effectively pushing Europe's role to the periphery. This approach markedly diminished the inclination of European states to participate in a conflict over whose formation they had exercised no influence.

• Dread of a refugee wave and social instability

Domestic and social factors also exercise a vital influence upon this decision. The experience of the refugee crisis in 2015 remains

vivid within Europe's political memory. The prospect of a new, and far more extensive, deluge of displaced persons could imperil the social and political stability of numerous European countries and furnish fertile ground for the reinforcement of extremist movements. Consequently, abstention from fomenting a war whose humanitarian repercussions would directly confront Europe transformed into a strategic priority. In summation, Europe's abstention from participation in this war does not emanate from an idealistic posture but rather is a pragmatic calculation, wherein the costs of entering the conflict were appraised as far exceeding its prospective benefits. As a result, Europe elected to distance itself from involvement in a crisis that could have intensified its domestic and international difficulties, prioritizing diplomacy and the preservation of stability.

The article was first published by the Abrar Moaser Tehran International Research Institute.



Europe's abstention from participation in this war does not emanate from an idealistic posture but rather is a pragmatic calculation, wherein the costs of entering the conflict were appraised as far exceeding its prospective benefits.

Ready or not — Europe's post-American future has arrived



By Joschka Fischer
Germany's former
foreign minister and
vice chancellor

OPINION

What will Europe be like without a US military and political presence? Europeans had better start preparing themselves for this eventuality because there is no longer any doubt that US President Donald Trump wants to end the North Atlantic alliance and is well on his way to doing so.

The only remaining question is whether he will formally withdraw the United States from NATO, or simply hollow it out through neglect and contempt. Either way, the alliance's dissolution has already begun. Ar-

rangements as long-standing and as tested as NATO usually do not collapse in a single day or through a single act. Rather, they erode as trust in their defining commitments — namely, mutual defense — diminishes. That is precisely what has been happening during Trump's second presidency, especially now that Europeans have refrained from joining his disastrous war of choice in the Middle East. Meanwhile, despite the Republican Party's supposed dedication to maintaining a strong US defense, no major figure in the party has called Trump out on the irreversible damage he has done.

Throughout the Cold War and the period following it, America's presence in Europe was the decisive factor in European se-

curity and internal stability. The US underwrote the peace and prosperity that allowed for economic integration and, ultimately, the creation of the European Union. But Trump and his MAGA movement could not care less about this history. For scarcely coherent reasons, they harbor deep hostilities toward the EU and are bent on dragging Europe back to the age of self-destructive nationalism.

It is a dangerously misguided objective, given that success would ultimately leave America itself much weaker and more isolated. But such arguments have no purchase on Trump. Following the electoral defeat of his illiberal ally in Hungary, Viktor Orbán, he will be even more inclined to leave Europeans to their own devices.

For the first time in eight decades, Europe will find itself on its own. Europeans will need to decide their own fate and take responsibility for their own security. This might sound like a banal observation, if not for Europe's uniquely bloody history. The US withdrawal from the European theater after World War I set the stage for Hitler's rise and, eventually, World War II. Had the world's premier military and economic power remained through the interwar years, German revanchism would have been a non-starter.

That was the lesson that the WWII generation drew from the war and applied in its aftermath. US President Harry S. Truman maintained a strong US presence in Europe, not only to



meet the threat posed by Stalin's Red Army — which was standing in Berlin, at the center of Europe — but also to alleviate Europeans' fears of German revanchism. This US decision created the conditions for moving toward "ever-closer union" in Europe. It was America's presence on the continent that allowed for Germany's eventual reunification and the eastward enlargement of NATO and the EU. Europe as we know it would never have emerged otherwise. What, then, does Europe's post-American future hold? Can it manage its security and maintain its unity without the US? For Germany, with its own history of hegemonic aspirations on the continent, America's withdrawal raises difficult questions.

Does the current generation of German political leadership exhibit the historical sensitivities needed to assume a new role, in partnership with France and others? The rise of the far-right Alternative für Deutschland shows that nothing can be taken for granted. On the question of who will lead Europe, there is no alternative to Germany and France. The two strongest European powers must step up to fill the vacuum. No longer can Europeans simply wait for the US to provide the necessary leadership. One wonders if Americans realize that they are destroying the greatest diplomatic success in their own history, as well as significantly weakening the foundation of American power and

prosperity. There is no reason to think that the US can simply dispense with its strategic counterpart and suffer no costs. Unfortunately, the window for reversing course has closed. The long American protectorate has come to an end under Trump, and it will not return. Europe must now chart its own course. Somehow, the transatlantic relationship — the very idea of the West — will need to be redefined whenever the MAGA fever breaks. But even amid so much uncertainty, one thing remains clear: Europeans and Americans will always be stronger in the new world order together than apart.

The article first appeared on Project Syndicate.



US Vice President JD Vance (l) gestures during a campaign event for Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban (r) in Budapest, Hungary, on April 7, 2026.
● JONATHAN ERNST/REUTERS

No more 'daddy'?

Trump becoming orphan with Euros over Iran



By Eldar Mamedov
Middle East
affairs expert

OPINION

In remarks unlikely to endear him to US President Donald Trump, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, recently offered a brutally candid assessment of Washington's war on Iran.

"This whole affair is, to say the least, ill-considered," Merz said. "At the moment, I cannot see what strategic exit the Americans are opting for. The Iranians are negotiating very skillfully — or rather, very skillfully not negotiating. An entire nation (the US) is being humiliated. The Iranians are clearly stronger than one thought. The Americans clearly don't seem to have a convincing negotiating strategy." Although other European leaders have not been quite so frank, the assessment voiced by Merz is clearly widespread. Challenged by rising energy costs and inflation, they are scrambling to control the political and potentially devastating economic fallout.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez emerged early on as the leader of the anti-war front. France and Italy have sought bilateral deals with Iran to negotiate passage of their ships through the Strait of Hormuz, the world's main artery for oil trade. Even Washington's closest European ally, the United Kingdom, has distanced itself from the war, drawing Trump's ire.

Overwhelming majorities of European citizens back these positions. According to newly released data by IPSOS, a French pollster, 88% of Germans either "strongly" or "somewhat" agree that their country should not be involved in the war in the Middle East. The numbers in France are 82% against the involvement to 14% in favor of it. In the UK, the numbers are 83% to 17%, and in Italy 84% to 12%. Even more striking, according to the same survey, 35% of Europeans now believe that China will have "an overall positive influence on world affairs" as opposed to 28% who think the same of the United States.

While citizens across the continent clearly oppose the Iran war, the German case is particularly noteworthy for a number of reasons, none of them flattering



US President Donald Trump (r) and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz talk with each other in the Oval Office at the White House in Washington, D.C., US, on March 3, 2026, in the midst of the US-Israeli war on Iran.
● JONATHAN ERNST/REUTERS

to the country's current leadership.

Merz, who has tied his political identity to transatlantic loyalty, was one of the rare European cheerleaders of a war he now decries as strategically inept. When Israel launched its attack on Iran in June 2025 — in the middle of negotiations between Washington and Tehran — Merz did not call for restraint. On the contrary, he praised Israel for doing what he called "the dirty work" on Europe's behalf.

When protests engulfed Iran in January this year, he predicted that the Iranian regime would be gone in a matter of weeks. When the US and Israel attacked again February 28, Merz said that it was "not the moment to lecture our allies, but to stand in unity."

What appears to have spurred Merz's apparent about-face is not a sudden discovery of the virtues of international law or the folly of the war. It's the fact that the war didn't go according to the plan. Instead of a swift regime change Merz banked on, there is a standoff between Washington and Tehran with no end in sight, and the double blockade of the Strait of Hormuz that has sent oil prices soaring above \$100 per barrel.

Merz's own approval ratings tanked to 19%, less than a year after assuming office, making him the least popular among Western leaders at the moment. The opposition nationalist Al-

ternative for Germany (AfD) now outperforms Merz's Christian Democracy in polls. Significantly, the AfD, unlike Merz, has opposed the war in Iran from the outset, openly calling for Germany to align its position with Spain's. The coming economic crunch, de-industrialization, inflation, instability and potential migration flows from the Middle East appear to worry German voters much more than the fate of the regime in Tehran.

While Merz's latest description of the US war is accurate, a truly honest assessment should include Germany's, and Europe's, own role in facilitating it. After all, this is the same European leadership that spent much of

last year competing to ingratiate itself with Trump — most notoriously when NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, referred to the president as "daddy," a groveling display that quickly became a continental embarrassment. That sycophancy wasn't an outlier. It was the logical endpoint of a Europe that traded strategic autonomy for Trump's fleeting approval.

In this context, Merz's early support for the US and Israel was the logical consequence of Germany's radicalizing posture towards the regime in Iran over the last few years. As a member of the E3 (with UK and France), Germany was a signatory of the 2015 nuclear deal with

Iran known as JCPOA. But rather than defend it when Trump withdrew from it in 2018, Berlin, together with London and Paris, chose to appease Trump by adopting a hardening posture on unrelated matters, such as Iran's ballistic missiles program and its support for various pro-Iranian armed groups (the "Axis of Resistance") throughout the region.

Germany, together with UK and France, pushed for a snapback of the UN Security Council's nuclear-related sanctions against Iran in 2025, aligning themselves behind the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" campaign, instead of allowing space for negotiations with Tehran to agree on the deal's successor.

Within the European Union, Germany was a leading proponent of designating the Islamic Revolution's Guards Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization, in contrast to a more cautious approach promoted by France. Eventually, Berlin succeeded in convincing the doubters. Of note, however, the UK still hasn't designated the Guards.

By betting everything on regime change, Germany and its E3 partners failed to develop a separate negotiation framework, a different set of incentives, or a genuine alternative to the US-Israeli war. It is an indictment of their policy that today there are no European powers mediating the end of the war. It is Pakistan, Oman, and Turkey. They are shuttling between Tehran and Washington because they still have relationships, credibility, and diplomatic bandwidth.

And the most striking thing is no one actually misses the Europeans. Quite the contrary. The E3 is seen not as a helpful broker but as an adjunct to Washington — more likely to posture, or to issue one-sided statements than to actually de-escalate. This is a textbook case of surrendering your leverage and relevance while still having to deal with all the negative consequences. And at this point, the only thing more humiliated than the United States is the European leadership that tied its fate to a failing superpower with no clear strategy for extracting itself and the rest of the world from the ever-deepening hole it has been digging for the past two months.



While Merz's latest description of the US war is accurate, a truly honest assessment should include Germany's, and Europe's, own role in facilitating it. After all, this is the same European leadership that spent much of last year competing to ingratiate itself with Trump — most notoriously when NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, referred to the president as "daddy," a groveling display that quickly became a continental embarrassment. That sycophancy wasn't an outlier.



US President Donald Trump (front) meets with NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte (r), French President Emmanuel Macron (2nd-R), German Chancellor Friedrich Merz (3rd-R), and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, among others, in the Oval Office after his call with Russian President Vladimir Putin on August 18, 2025.
● DANIEL TOROK/WHITE HOUSE

The article first appeared on Responsible Statecraft.

Taj urges FIFA to show 'clarity' over Iran's World Cup controversy

Sports Desk

Mahdi Taj, the president of the Iranian Football Federation (FFIRI), said he will seek answers regarding certain issues about Iran's participation at the World Cup – co-hosted by the United States, Mexico, and Canada from June 11 – in a meeting with FIFA officials in Zurich later this month.

The FFIRI chief – a former member of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) – made the remarks upon returning to Tehran on Friday, after he and his two colleagues abruptly left Toronto earlier in the week, abandoning their onward trip to Vancouver for the 76th FIFA Congress.

Iran's delegation was the only absentee from the 211-member congress as Thursday's meeting got underway, following a clash with Canadian border officials earlier. While media reports suggested that immigration authorities denied the delegation entry into Canada, Taj insisted that it was their own decision to leave the North American country after exhaustive questioning about his ties with the IRGC – which was listed by Canada as a "terrorist group" in 2024 – and "offensive insults directed at the country's proud armed forces." FIFA sources described the mat-

ter as a "regrettable situation" but insisted that Iran had been invited to attend the congress and that responsibility for deciding who enters the country lay with Canadian authorities.

Despite the latest controversy surrounding Iran's World Cup campaign, FIFA President Gianni Infantino insisted during the congress on Friday that Team Melli will definitely visit the United States to fulfill Group G fixtures against New Zealand, Belgium, and Egypt.

"Let me start by confirming straight away, for those who maybe want to say something else or write something else, that of course Iran will be participating at the FIFA World Cup 2026," Infantino said. "And of course, Iran will play in the United States of America. The reason for that is simple: because we have to unite. We have to bring people together."

"There are enough problems around the world. There are enough people who try to divide all over the world. If nobody tries to unite, what will happen to our world? We have to do it, and we have this opportunity."

However, Taj, blaming the international governing body for "being intimidated by the United States," said that he will have an urgent meeting at FIFA headquarters in the coming weeks to



"reach clarity" over the uncertain situation surrounding the national team.

"I spoke to [FIFA secretary general] Mattias Grafström without hesitation," Taj said. "My colleagues

were surprised at how strongly I spoke. I told him that I had never seen FIFA so weak. I told them they only issue condemnations instead of taking practical action."

"They put the Italian flag in place of Iran's flag, and FIFA only condemned it. The U.S. president said there would be no security for our national team in his country, and you showed no

reaction to his obscene remarks. Now we go to Canada with visas, but we return because of insults, and again FIFA does nothing but condemn," Taj added, referring to a suggestion made by U.S. special envoy Paolo Zampolli in April to replace Iran with Italy at the World Cup, which was firmly rejected by Italian officials.

Taj, who was denied a U.S. entry visa for the World Cup draw ceremony last December, emphasized that the matter is not personal but national: "There are many issues. The World Cup organizers must not allow any flag other than Iran's into the stadiums. We have said the situation has now broadened. They must say what they will do for journalists and spectators, what conditions will be for those of our players who served in the IRGC, and how officials and companions will be accommodated." Taj's concerns were fueled by U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio's comments last week that some members of the Iranian federation who "have ties to the IRGC" may experience difficulties accompanying the national team in the United States.

Iran is set to begin its World Cup campaign against New Zealand in Los Angeles on June 15, where it is also due to play Belgium six days later, before taking on Egypt in Seattle on June 26.

Iranian libero Hazratpour sets sights on Olympic quota



Iranian libero Mohammadreza Hazratpour is seen in a national team training session in Tehran, Iran, on May 1, 2026.

Sports Desk

Iranian libero Mohammadreza Hazratpour has declared that securing a quota for the Olympic Games is the primary objective for the national volleyball team ahead of a hectic international season. Iran's 30-man squad, featuring domestic league players, began a training camp on Friday in Tehran for the upcoming FIVB Men's Volleyball Nations League, which will start with a daunting test against Brazil in Brasília on June 10. Italian head coach Roberto Piazza's men will also chase a fifth Asian Championship title in eight editions from September 4 in Fukuoka, Japan. Beyond continental glory, additional incentive awaits in Fukuoka as the tournament winner will secure direct qualification to the L.A. 2028 Olympics. A potential showdown between Iran and Japan could

follow at the Aichi-Nagoya 2026 Asian Games, which begin on September 19, where Piazza's side will vie for a fourth consecutive men's gold medal.

Speaking on the sidelines of the second session of the preparatory camp, Hazratpour expressed optimism about the team's condition and outlining the high-stakes season ahead.

"We started our training on Friday," Hazratpour said. "Although we have been away from action and training for about two months, fortunately, all the players have entered the camp with excellent physical fitness and high morale." The libero emphasized the significance of the upcoming year and the team's ultimate goal. "We have a very important and difficult year ahead of us. In these critical circumstances, everyone must work hand in hand to first secure the Olympic quota, and then

achieve the best possible results in international competitions," he added.

Hazratpour also spoke about his personal readiness, stating he feels more motivated and energetic than last year. "We have decisive tournaments ahead, such as the Volleyball Nations League (VNL) and the Asian Championship, which represent the chance to qualify for the Olympics." The veteran libero noted that despite some damage to the national team's training hall – caused by the U.S.-Israeli airstrikes – the decision was made to stay in the capital. "Initially, there was a plan to hold the camp in the northern city of Noor, but considering the centralized facilities in Tehran – including the training hall, gym, and restaurant – we preferred to continue our training here. I hope bright days await Iranian volleyball." The training camp will run

until May 20.

Tricky tests will come thick and fast in Week 1 of the VNL preliminaries for Piazza's men, who will take on Bulgaria – finalists at last September's World Championships – on June 11, before facing Argentina and Belgium later in the Brazilian capital.

Iran will then visit Orléans, France, for the second week of action, starting with a mammoth task against the host and reigning Olympic champion France at the CO'Met Arena on June 24. This will be followed by matches against the United States (June 25), Japan (June 26), and Cuba (June 28).

The third and final week of the preliminaries will see the Asian powerhouse go head-to-head with Ukraine in Belgrade on July 15, with further tests against Germany (July 16), Slovenia (July 17), and Turkey (July 19).

Esteghlal leading preparation for WASL qualifiers

Sports Desk

Esteghlal Tehran's basketball team has emerged as the frontrunner among Iranian top-flight contenders to resume training for the country's West Asia Super League qualifiers.

The move comes following a decision by the Iranian Basketball Federation to declare the Premier League season null and void amid the ongoing conflict involving the United States and Israel. With no champion crowned, attention has now turned to a condensed competition

featuring the top four teams from the regular season table to determine who will secure Asia's coveted spot. Shahrdari Gorgan leads the table with 16 wins from 19 games, level on 35 points with second-placed Esteghlal and Kaleh Mazandaran, while Tabiat sits fourth with 32 points courtesy of 13 wins.

Among these contenders, the Tehran Blues have taken the lead. Not only were they the first club to submit an official letter confirming their readiness to participate in the qualifying tour-

nament, but they have now also broken the training deadlock, positioning themselves as the most serious candidate to claim the valuable Asian quota.

According to an official statement from the club, Esteghlal's first training session will be held on Monday, with the team – led by former Iran head coach Mehran Shahintab – starting to implement physical conditioning and tactical drills in preparation for the upcoming showdown against their rivals.

Esteghlal's Alireza Pour-

bafrani, the team director, confirmed the news in an interview with Varzesh3, stating: "Shahintab, while expressing gratitude to the club's management, the players, and the unwavering support of the fans, has placed special emphasis on the importance of this path. Esteghlal is fully prepared to succeed in these upcoming matches, giving everything to defend the great name of this club."

The national governing body has yet to announce the dates and schedule for the four-team event.



War takes toll on historic landmarks in Tabriz, Maragheh

Iranica Desk

Following the latest wave of strikes, damage has extended into Iran's cultural heritage sector, with a number of historical sites affected. Preliminary reports indicate that 149 heritage sites across 20 provinces have sustained damage, highlighting the scale of threats facing the country's historical assets. East Azarbaijan Province has not been spared, with both the Measurement Museum (Salmasi House) in Tabriz and the Blue Dome of Maragheh among the impacted landmarks.

The deputy head of East Azarbaijan Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department has outlined the extent of damage inflicted on the two sites during recent military attacks by the US and



● IRNA

Israel on Iran. Vahid Navadad told ISNA that assessments of the damage are ongoing. He explained that in the early days of the attacks —

around March 9, 2026 — simultaneous airstrikes by Israeli and US forces on the cities of Maragheh and Tabriz caused blast waves that resulted in minor

damage to the two historical structures.

"One of the affected buildings is the historic Salmasi House (Measurement Museum) in Tabriz,

which sustained damage to various sections," he said. "In addition, the highly valuable orosi windows — an essential architectural feature and a key element of the building's identity — were also damaged."

Regarding the Blue Dome of Maragheh, Navadad noted that parts of the structure's decorative elements were affected, with some sections detaching from the body of the monument and falling to the ground.

He added that the provincial Cultural Heritage Department promptly prepared an initial report and carried out documentation in the early days following the incident. As a first step toward restoration, specialized studies are now underway by qualified consultants, including academic and technical experts,

to determine appropriate intervention methods.

"For the Salmasi House, these studies are being conducted using scientific and research-based approaches, incorporating modern reinforcement techniques," Navadad said. "The building is being modeled to help define precise restoration and structural strengthening methods."

Similar conservation and restoration studies have begun on the Blue Dome's decorative elements and are currently in progress. Once these studies are completed, their findings will be reviewed by the provincial Cultural Heritage Technical Council. Pending approval and allocation of the necessary funding, restoration work will begin.

Navadad concluded that preliminary field inspections have provided an initial estimate of the damage, with a final assessment to be announced after the completion of detailed studies and the determination of intervention strategies.

Saheb Divani Tomb at Hafezieh to undergo restoration

Iranica Desk

Shiraz — widely known as the city of poetry and literature — annually welcomes millions of visitors who travel to pay tribute to the renowned Persian poet Hafez at his tomb in the Hafezieh complex. In addition to the main mausoleum, the historic site includes several lesser-known sections, each representing a valuable part of Iran's architectural and cultural heritage.

Over the decades, exposure to environmental factors such as rain, humidity, and direct sunlight has caused significant deterioration. Cracks in the walls, eroded brickwork, and damage to plaster decorations and traditional Yazdi-Bandi elements are among the visible signs of

decay. Inadequate insulation has further increased the risk of moisture infiltration, posing a serious threat to the building's structural stability. Experts warn that neglecting such sites could result in the gradual loss of important layers of Shiraz's architectural and cultural identity.

Against this backdrop, the launch of restoration work has been welcomed as a positive development. Sadegh Zarei, Deputy Head of Fars Province's Cultural Heritage Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, announced that the Saheb-Divani Tomb will undergo restoration. He described the project as an important step toward preserving and revitalizing a valuable yet underappreciated part of the Hafezieh Complex. The initiative

aims to address damage caused by time and environmental conditions, with restoration plans developed accordingly.

"The ultimate goal of this project is to restore the authenticity and former grandeur of this section of Hafezieh," he said, adding that the site will be preserved both as a historical monument and as a cultural space for researchers and visitors.

Officials say the restoration will also help redefine Hafezieh as a comprehensive cultural hub. Improvements to the entrance and surrounding areas are expected to symbolically reconnect the administrative architectural heritage of the past with the spiritual atmosphere of Hafez's tomb. Such efforts, they note, will

deepen visitors' engagement with the site's historical and literary layers, transforming a simple visit into a more meaningful cultural and intellectual experience.

In recent years, the Saheb-Divani Tomb has functioned as a specialized Hafez Studies Center. Its restoration is therefore expected to have a direct impact on the quality of literary research in Shiraz. A safer, restored environment will facilitate academic gatherings, exhibitions of manuscripts, and improved access to research materials.

Previously, the building's deteriorating condition had discouraged prolonged use by researchers and at times posed safety risks for group activities.



● IRNA

With planned structural reinforcement and improved moisture insulation, these obstacles are expected to be removed,

enabling the Hafez Studies Center to play a more active role in promoting the poet's works and thought.

Caracal embodies Iran's untouched desert beauty

Iranica Desk

The Caracal Desert in Yazd Province is among Iran's most beautiful and least explored desert regions, offering golden sand dunes, peaceful silence, and a star-filled night sky that together create a unique experience for visitors. The desert provides an escape from urban life, allowing travelers to experience true tranquility and a closer connection with nature. Walking on warm sands, watching sunrise and sunset, and spending the night in the desert's silence create lasting memories. This report highlights the natural beauty, activities, and local culture of the Caracal Desert in an accessible and engaging way.

The desert's soft, wave-like sand dunes are one of its main attractions. At sunrise, gentle morning light falls across the dunes, forming striking shadows and patterns across the sand. At sunset, the landscape turns into a dreamlike scene, with golden, orange, and red tones spreading across the horizon. At night, the clear sky reveals countless stars, creating a calm and extraordinary atmosphere. Visitors can hear the wind and shifting sand, experiencing a sense of timelessness and absolute silence rarely

found in urban environments. Sparse vegetation and small desert animals such as lizards and local birds contribute to the area's untouched ecosystem, while animal footprints on the sand add to the sense of natural discovery.



and desert mice. Birdlife is also significant, with falcons, local eagles, and other species of dry and semi-dry habitats commonly observed. Despite harsh conditions, the vegetation is diverse and resilient, making the desert an important destination for na-



The name Caracal Desert is derived from the caracal, a rare wild cat species once believed to inhabit the region. Also known locally as the lynx-like wild cat, the caracal is a fast and elusive predator. Although sightings are rare today, the name has given the desert a distinct identity and increased interest among travelers.

The Caracal Desert is also a unique habitat for species adapted to arid environments. Mammals in the region include the caracal cat, desert foxes, small wolves, desert squirrels,

and desert mice. Birdlife is also significant, with falcons, local eagles, and other species of dry and semi-dry habitats commonly observed. Despite harsh conditions, the vegetation is diverse and resilient, making the desert an important destination for na-

ture lovers and environmental enthusiasts. Travel to the Caracal Desert also offers an opportunity to experience local culture and lifestyle. The hospitality of local communities, traditional foods, and handicrafts enrich the journey. Visitors can observe carpet weaving, traditional bread baking, and the production of local products such as dates and natural honey, and in some cases take part in these activities. These experiences not only enhance tourism but also support local

livelihoods and help preserve cultural traditions.

The desert offers a variety of recreational activities. Camel riding provides a traditional and peaceful way to explore the landscape. Desert safaris and off-road driving with 4x4 vehi-



● IRNA

cles offer adventure and excitement, while sandboarding adds a sporting element to the dunes. Camping overnight in the desert allows visitors to experience the star-filled sky and complete silence. Photography enthusiasts can capture unforgettable moments of sunrise, sunset, and night skies. Some local tours also offer astronomy sessions and introductions to desert wildlife and plants.

Several attractions surround the Caracal Desert, enriching the overall travel experience. The nearby city of Bafq is the

closest urban center, offering accommodation and local markets. The historic city of Yazd, located about 110 kilometers away, provides rich cultural and historical attractions. Surrounding villages near Bafq allow visitors to experience traditional

sufficient water, appropriate clothing and footwear, sunscreen, sunglasses, and essential travel gear.

To preserve the desert's beauty and ensure safety, visitors are encouraged not to leave waste behind, to stay on designated paths, avoid loud activities, use certified local guides, and respect local wildlife and vegetation. Campfires should be carefully controlled, and artificial lighting kept to a minimum to protect the desert's natural silence and ecosystem. These practices ensure a safe and memorable experience for all visitors.

Supporting local communities through purchasing handicrafts, hiring local guides, and staying in eco-lodges helps sustain the region's economy and cultural heritage. Participation in cultural activities such as traditional cooking or music further enriches the travel experience.

With its stunning landscapes, unique wildlife, starry skies, diverse activities, and rich local culture, the Caracal Desert stands out as an exceptional destination for travelers seeking nature, adventure, and tranquility in Iran. Responsible tourism ensures that its natural and cultural beauty is preserved for future generations.

Iran logs 29.7m Nowruz trips as police oversee 'peace of mind' travel



Social Desk

Iran recorded 29.7 million domestic trips during the Nowruz holidays, Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri said on Saturday, crediting traffic police with safeguarding "peace of mind" for travelers and streamlining nationwide mobility. Speaking at a joint session with senior traffic police commanders, Salehi-Amiri pointed to coordinated road management, emergency coverage and public-service delivery as key to maintaining social order and easing holiday congestion, IRNA reported. He described the police as the state body "closest" to citizens, whose conduct helps shore up public trust and social

capital. "Psychological security" during travel, he said, is integral to quality of life. The visible deployment of traffic police, rescue teams and service agencies over the Persian New Year period played a "notable" role in fostering calm across busy corridors. The minister also flagged evolving travel patterns in the Iranian calendar year which started on March 21, 2026, with more families opting for rural destinations and staying with relatives. The shift, he said, stresses the country's deep-rooted social and cultural ties while easing pressure on formal accommodation. Low complaint volumes during the peak season reflected "effective" inter-agency coordination

and broad public satisfaction, according to the ministry's readout. Looking ahead, Salehi-Amiri called for scaling up tourism infrastructure, expanding lodging capacity and backing private investment to meet rising demand. Upgrading the transport fleet and diversifying tourism vehicles, he added, are "necessary" to deliver safer, higher-quality journeys. Traffic Police Chief Brigadier General Teymour Hosseini said special traffic schemes, cross-agency coordination and fuel supply management kept flows orderly on high-traffic routes. He stressed that improving vehicle standards would curb road incidents while lifting driving culture and overall satisfaction.

TMoCA stages 'Art & War' show with global pop art icons

Arts & Culture Desk

Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMOCA) opens its 'Art & War' exhibition today, presenting works by leading international pop artists, including Robert Indiana, James Rosenquist and Roy Lichtenstein, museum officials said, in a showcase that probes how global conflicts have shaped modern artistic expression. Drawn from the museum's renowned collection, the opening section features six hallmark pieces that channel artists' responses to war and crisis through bold visual language



and conceptual critique, ISNA reported. The display foregrounds what curators describe as art's "reflective" and "resistant" role in times of upheaval, inviting visitors to engage with narratives of conflict beyond conventional historical accounts. The week-long program, run-

ning through May 10, shows the museum's international outlook, bringing globally recognized voices into dialogue with local audiences. The series will roll out additional works in phases, broadening the scope for examining how contemporary wars have informed evolving artistic movements. By framing conflict through the lens of pop art, the exhibition offers a rare opportunity to revisit pivotal global episodes as interpreted by influential Western artists, while fostering cross-cultural understanding within Tehran's vibrant arts scene.

Tehran cinemathèque to screen five anti-war films under 'American Lie' banner

Arts & Culture Desk

The Cinemathèque of Iran's House of Artists will present a curated package of five internationally recognized anti-war films under the title "American Lie" from May 4 to May 8, in Tehran. The program spotlights cinematic works that interrogate the moral and psychological toll of conflict within American and Western narratives. Screenings open at 6 p.m. in Naser Hall and aim to frame war through critical, introspective lens-

es, Mehr News Agency reported. The lineup includes Clint Eastwood's 'American Sniper' (2014), Jasmila Žbanić's 'Quo Vadis, Aida?' (2020), Alex Garland's 'Civil War' (2024), Scott Z. Burns' 'The Report' (2019), and Gavin Hood's 'Official Secrets' (2019). Organizers describe the series as an exploration of "American Lie," a curatorial label highlighting perceived contradictions between public narratives and lived wartime realities. The selection spans investigative



drama, political thriller, and war commentary.

Iran tallies \$119m in school damage in recent aggression, vows swift rebuild

Social Desk

Iran's Education Minister Alireza Kazemi said on Saturday that damage to schools and education offices during the recent war reached 220,000 billion rials, roughly \$119 million at current rates, as authorities press ahead with reconstruction and pursue an international case over a deadly school attack. Speaking on the sidelines of a Teachers' Day ceremony marking educators' renewed pledge of allegiance, Kazemi said 1,200 schools sustained "serious" damage nationwide, many requiring full demolition and rebuilding, IRNA reported. "Through round-the-clock efforts," he added, most sites have already been readied and students relocated, underscoring the system's rapid response. Only 20 campuses remain due to the



scale of destruction, he said, noting they will be redesigned as "symbolic" and modern facilities and delivered by the start of the academic year in September 2027. The ministry is coordinating with planning and administrative bodies to upgrade standards while expanding equitable access and quality, he said. Kazemi framed teachers as a national backbone whose influence extends beyond classrooms. Their visible presence in public life, he said, helped galvanize families and students during the conflict, while the country's professionals, from pi-

lots to physicians, are "all shaped" by the teacher's craft. He also thanked President Masoud Pezeshkian, First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref, and budget and civil service authorities for sustained support to education despite constraints, citing stepped-up measures on welfare and system quality. On the attack on the Shajareh Tayebah school in Minab, where students and teachers were killed on February 28, Kazemi said a legal dossier has been opened at the international level. He described the site as a future "museum" of the enemy's crimes and a major cultural and educational hub, drawing visitors in organized caravans to bear witness to what he called Iran's "Karbala." Iran observes Teachers' Day annually on May 2, with ceremonies that reaffirm the role of educators in national development and cultural life.

Sea route reopens as tourists return to Kish after two-month pause

Social Desk

Iran's Kish Free Zone Organization said on Saturday it has resumed maritime travel for tourists to Kish Island, reopening a key leisure corridor after two months of wartime restrictions, with the first passenger vessel docking earlier in the day. The move follows the lifting of limits imposed after the outbreak of the war on February 28, which led to a suspension of flights to the Persian Gulf resort island after attacks by US-Israeli forces. During that period, sea routes served as the

sole lifeline, though access was restricted to residents, business operators, and those with immediate family ties on the island. On Saturday, the first group of tourists arrived aboard the passenger vessel Berlian, sailing the Bandar-e Charak-Kish route, marking a cautious restart of the island's tourism flow. Authorities described the reopening as a "gradual normalization" of travel conditions. In its statement, the organization urged travelers to secure accommodation in advance, noting that many hotels remain temporarily

closed as services scale back up. Officials said efforts are underway to fully restore air connectivity. Managing Director of Kish Free Zone Organization Mohammad Kabiri said the island has been prioritized in coordination with the Civil Aviation Organization, expressing hope that flights to Kish International Airport will resume in the coming week. Kish, a flagship tourism hub in southern Iran, is known for its coral beaches and duty-free commercial zones, drawing both domestic and regional visitors.