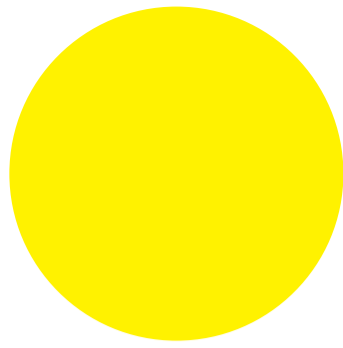


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US 'Freedom Project' in SOH; crucible for military clout and diplomatic openness

By Somayeh Yaqouti
International Affairs Expert

O P I N I O N
E X C L U S I V E

The US "Freedom Project" in the Strait of Hormuz faced serious structural challenges from the outset. The suspension of this plan sheds light on important aspects of the initiative's true nature. Operationally, the project more closely resembled a process of strategic trial and error than a comprehensive, pre-designed plan. Washington has in effect been sounding out regional and international reactions to this move and has yet to settle on a sustainable strategy.

From a strategic standpoint, the initiative sits at the intersection of several objectives. First, to showcase US military presence and power in a region where its influence has declined in recent years. Second, to send a message to regional allies that Washington remains committed to its security obligations. Third, to exert pressure on Iran without sliding into a full-scale military confrontation. The fundamental problem, however, is that these goals are at times in conflict with one another, and pursuing them simultaneously requires a balance the US has not yet achieved.

The lack of broad international participation stands as the project's greatest challenge. Unlike similar operations in the past that at least enjoyed symbolic backing from European or Asian allies, this time Washington is acting largely on its own. This isolation not only drives up operational costs but also calls the initiative's international legitimacy into question. Other countries prefer to rely on diplomatic channels or bilateral security arrangements with Iran rather than take part in a US-led military coalition.

Moreover, the sustainability of the plan is further complicated by budgetary and manpower constraints within the US Navy. Maintaining a constant fleet presence in the Strait of Hormuz requires significant resources, which would have to be diverted from other strategic missions—particularly in the Pacific, where the US is countering China. This intensifying competition for resources undermines the project's long-term viability.

Finally, it must be noted that this initiative is being carried out at a time when the US is under domestic pressure to de-escalate tensions with Iran. This contradiction between military action and diplomatic intent further adds to the project's ambiguous and dual nature. It appears that Washington is testing the hypothesis of whether it can maintain military pressure while simultaneously keeping the path to negotiations open.

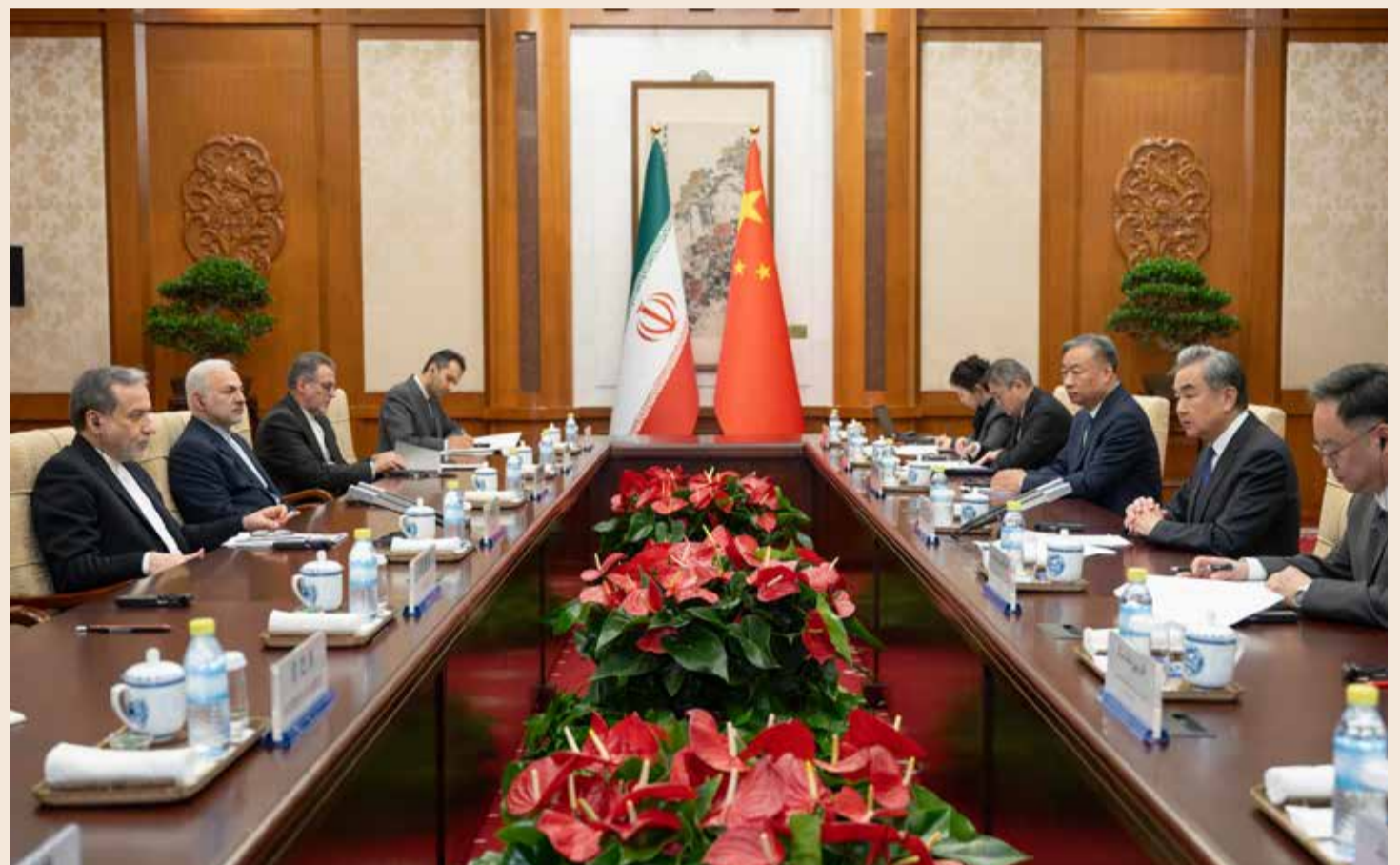
Obstacles to international participation

Countries with a stake in the security of the Strait of Hormuz—particularly South Korea, Japan, India, and European states—find themselves in a highly complex position. On the one hand, they are heavily dependent on the security of this maritime route for energy imports and trade; on the other, a range of political, economic, and security considerations hold them back from active participation in the project. [Page 3 >](#)

Tehran to accept no less than 'fair, comprehensive' deal: **عزت‌الله**

China denounces 'illegitimate' US-Israeli war on Iran

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Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (7st L) talks with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi (2nd R), in Beijing, China, on May 6, 2026. XINHUA



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Tehran to accept no less than 'fair, comprehensive' deal: Araghchi

China denounces 'illegitimate' US-Israeli war on Iran

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Wednesday that Tehran would use all its strength in negotiations to protect its legitimate rights and interests, stressing that Iran will not be satisfied with anything less than a "fair and comprehensive agreement."

The Iranian foreign minister made the remarks in a meeting with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in Beijing.

It was the first visit by the Iranian foreign minister to China since the start of the US-Israeli aggression against Iran on February 28.

Araghchi's remarks came as hopes are rising for the resumption of peace talks between Tehran and Washington to end the US-Israeli aggression after the first round of the talks mediated by Pakistan failed to produce agreement due to the US's excessive demands.

US President Donald Trump

said Tuesday he was pausing the US effort to guide stranded vessels out of the Strait of Hormuz to allow time for a deal to end the Iran war.

He said the US blockade of Iranian ports, however, would remain in place as Tehran kept up its own closure of the vital trade route in response to the US-Israeli campaign, rattling markets and spiking fuel prices.

Trump said the move was based "on the request of Pakistan and other Countries and the fact that, "Great Progress has been made toward a Complete and Final Agreement with Representatives of Iran."

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif was optimistic Trump's "courageous leadership and timely announcement" could foster a deal.

"We are very hopeful that the current momentum will lead to a lasting agreement that secures durable peace and stability for the region and beyond," he said in a post on X.

Washington is now confident that it is close to reaching a deal with Tehran to reopen the crucial waterway and halt the conflict, US news outlet Axios reported Wednesday, citing two US officials.

It reported both sides are close to agreeing on a "one-page memorandum of understanding to end the war," and start a 30-day period of talks that could take place in Geneva or Islamabad.

Call for complete ceasefire

During the meeting in Beijing, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi called the US-Israeli war on Tehran "illegitimate" and urged a complete ceasefire.

"We believe that a comprehensive ceasefire is urgently needed, that a resumption of hostilities is not acceptable, and that it is particularly important to remain committed to dialogue and negotiations," Wang told Araghchi.



Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (L) shakes hands with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi before a meeting in Beijing, China, on May 6, 2026.

● XINHUA

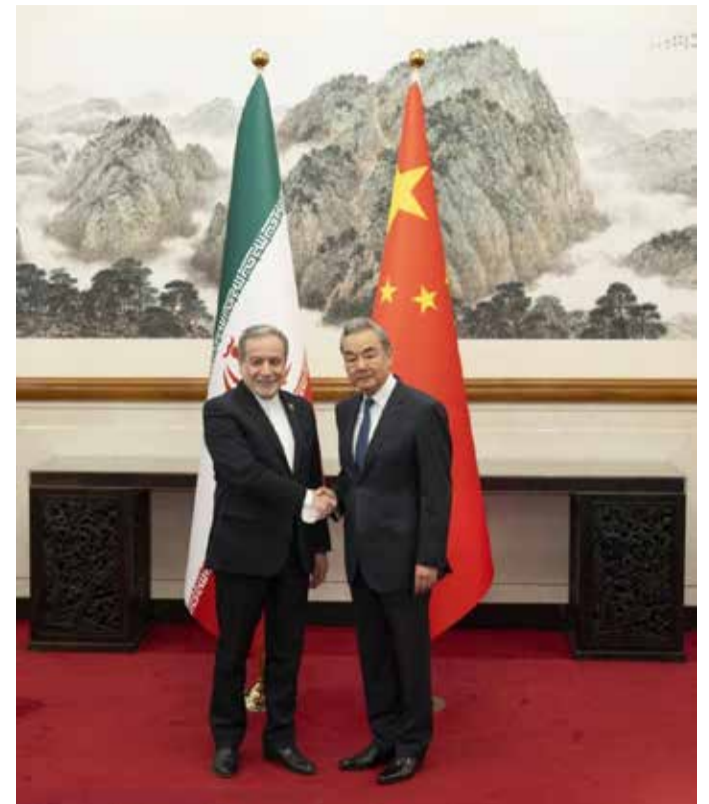
He criticized the military aggressions of the US and Israel against Iran, adding, "The region is passing through a decisive turning point and direct meetings between the parties are essential."

Araghchi thanked China for its firm stand, describing Beijing as a sincere friend to Tehran.

China's foreign minister also said Beijing would play a "greater role" in ending hostilities.

China is a key customer for Iranian oil, defying sanctions imposed by the United States, and is directly affected by the blockage of the Strait of Hormuz bordered by Iran.

Beijing has quietly engaged in efforts to resolve the weeklong crisis and its diplomacy is cred-



ited with playing an important role in the fragile ceasefire agreed between Washington and Tehran.

China "will work harder to ease tensions and end the fighting, continue to support the launch of peace talks, and play a greater role in restoring peace and

tranquility to the Middle East," Wang said.

"On the nuclear issue, China welcomes Iran's commitment not to develop nuclear weapons, while considering that Iran has the legitimate right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy," Wang said.

Pezeshkian says Iran never to cave in to US bullying, coercion

International Desk

Iranian President said on Tuesday that Iran rejects the language of threats, and will never submit to US "bullying" as tensions are still high between Tehran and Washington following an aggression against Iran on February 28.

However, the Iranian president said that Iran is prepared to engage any dialogue within the framework of international law.

Pezeshkian made the remarks in a phone call with Iraqi prime minister-designate Ali Faleh al-Zaidi on Tuesday, during which they discussed the challenges faced by regional countries following the US-Israeli aggression against Iran.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran is ready for any dialogue within the framework of international law, but based on its faith, belief, and conviction, it has not submitted and will never submit to coercion in any way. If they speak to us logically, dialogue is possible, but the language of threats and bullying will not lead anywhere," Pezeshkian said during the phone call.

The US and Israel started a fresh round of aerial aggression on Iran on February 28, some eight months after they carried out unprovoked attacks on the country.

Iran began to swiftly retaliate against the strikes by launching barrages of missile and drone attacks on the Israeli-occupied territories as well as



Masoud Pezeshkian



Ali Faleh al-Zaidi

on US bases and interests in regional countries.

On April 8, a Pakistan-brokered temporary ceasefire between Iran and the US took effect. However, subsequent peace negotiations in Islamabad ultimately failed amid Washington's maximalist demands and insistence on unreasonable positions.

Despite the ongoing ceasefire announced, US President Donald Trump continues to threaten Iran with military aggression, while refusing to lift a so-called naval blockade on Iranian ports in the Persian Gulf.

Iran has maintained that the blockade amounts to piracy and warned that if the security of its ports in the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman is threatened, no other port will be safe.

Pezeshkian stressed that the Islamic Republic is keen to maintain its relations with the Persian Gulf Arab states

based on good neighborliness.

"We do not want any conflict with our brothers in the region, but the reality is that our country's schools, hospitals, and infrastructure were bombed from American bases located on the territory of some countries in the region and with the use of their space and facilities," he said.

"We call for unity and cohesion among the Muslim Ummah based on religious teachings, and we believe that if the right, fair, and just path is followed, there will be no reason left for disagreement," the president added.

For his part, al-Zaidi vowed to enhance relations with Iran in the economic, political, security and regional convergence fields.

He also expressed Baghdad's readiness to host negotiations between Iran and the United States with the aim of ending the war.

Iran dismisses claims of missile strikes on UAE

Tehran urges Abu Dhabi to refrain from aligning with aggressors

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry in a statement rejected accusations leveled by the United Arab Emirates against Tehran, calling on the Persian Gulf Arab country to discontinue its alignment and cooperation with the parties that are hostile towards Iran.

The statement came after the UAE accused Iran of attacking the country with a barrage of missiles and drones, setting an oil refinery ablaze in the eastern emirate of Fujairah and wounding three Indian nationals.

The UAE's Ministry of Defense said its air defenses "engaged" 12 ballistic missiles, three cruise missiles and four drones launched from Iran on Monday.

But Iran's state broadcaster IRIB quoted a well-informed military source as saying that Iran had "no pre-planned program to attack the mentioned oil facilities."

Iran's Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters stressed that no such operations had been conducted, adding that any action would have been "clearly and officially announced."

Moreover, Iran's Foreign Ministry denounced Emirati rulers for accusing Iran of targeting the Arab country, underlining that the Islamic Republic's retaliatory measures are solely aimed at hostile targets inside the Emirates.

It condemned the accusations as baseless, in alignment with the United States, and in violation of the fundamental principles of the United Nations Charter.

In the face of the accusations, the message went on, "The Islamic Republic has exercised maximum



IRNA

restraint, adopting a responsible approach and out of respect for the collective good of the region and the Muslim community."

However, the ministry concluded, the Islamic Republic "will not hesitate to take any necessary and appropriate measures to defend its national interests and security."

The Iranian Foreign Ministry also noted that Abu Dhabi's allowing its soil to be amply used for attacks targeting Iran throughout the latest round of the United States' and the Israeli regime's unprovoked aggression against the country.

It cautioned the Emirates against continuing its "destructive actions in collusion with the hostile parties."

The UAE and a whole host of other regional states, including Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Jordan, have allowed their respective territories to serve as launch pads for attacks on the Iranian soil throughout the aggression that lasted from February 28 until April 8.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



IRCS lodges 35 war crimes complaints against US, Israel

The head of the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) says Tehran has sent 35 documents proving war crimes committed by the US and Israel during the recent aggression against the country to international organizations.

Speaking at a news conference on Wednesday, Pirhossein Kolivand noted that the Red Crescent Society has informed international forums about the dimensions of US-Israeli war crimes in Iran.

"One of our achievements in this regard was that we asked the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to accept the documents provided by the

Red Crescent of the Islamic Republic of Iran as official evidence," he said.

He noted that the society has so far "registered 35 documents on violations" of international humanitarian law committed by the US and Israel in Iran war, Press TV reported.

"If you look at the interviews of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, you see that after the twentieth letter they explicitly do not recognize Israel as a country," Kolivand said.

He noted that representatives of several international organizations arrived in Iran, adding that a high-ranking UN

representative said that he "will be the voice of the Iranian people."

He added that a delegation from Iran's Red Crescent Society will travel to Geneva in mid-June to tell the governments about the clear and transparent crimes of the Zionist-American regime.

The official noted that Iran's efforts to pursue legal action against the aggressors comes as the late Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, who was martyred in the first day of the US-Israeli aggression, had instructed the country's officials to pursue the rights of the nation through legal channels.

Oil prices slip on easing tensions; Iran light crude holds at \$110

Economy Desk

Oil prices dropped for a second straight day on Wednesday on optimism over easing geopolitical tensions in West Asia, while data showed Iranian crude trading at \$110 per barrel, according to market reports.

The specialized OilPrice website said in its latest update that Iran's light crude for delivery at the Sidi Kerir terminal in Egypt was priced at \$110.64 per barrel, marking one of its highest levels.

According to the data, Iranian heavy crude was priced at \$108.49 per barrel for delivery at Sidi Kerir, while light and heavy grades delivered in the Mediterranean were quoted at \$108.74 and \$106.59 per barrel, respectively, with Sidi Kerir recording the highest prices. Oil prices plunged on Wednesday after reports that the United States and Iran are close to agreeing on a one-page memorandum.

Brent crude fell 10% to \$98 and US West Texas Intermediate dropped more than 12% to \$89 after reports emerged that Washington and Tehran are discussing a one-page memorandum to pause the Hormuz conflict.

Separately, in official settlement data, Brent futures fell \$1.89, or 1.7%, to \$107.98 a barrel, after a 4% drop in the previous session, while US West Texas Intermediate crude declined \$1.83, or 1.8%, to \$100.44 per barrel following a 3.9% fall a day earlier.

A US naval blockade of Iranian ports since mid-April has sharply reduced oil exports, leading to a rapid buildup of crude both onshore and offshore. Data from analytics firm Kpler showed Iranian crude loadings dropping from around 2.1 million barrels per day (bpd) before the blockade to about 567,000 bpd in recent weeks.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has recently warned that Iran may be forced to shut down oil wells within a

week as storage nears capacity under intensified sanctions and maritime restrictions. Maritime intelligence firm TankerTrackers challenged US claims that Iran's oil production is close to shutdown due to storage constraints, saying output could be sustained even if exports fall sharply.

The US pressure is proclaimed to be part of "Operation Economic Fury," targeting Iran's oil exports, financial networks and shipping routes to strain its economy. US President Donald Trump imposed the naval blockade on Iran's ports in mid-April, aiming to pressure Tehran into a peace agreement after a war that began in late February.

Meanwhile, Iran said it would continue monitoring traffic through the Strait of Hormuz. Under new conditions set by Tehran, only commercial vessels with prior authorization are allowed to transit, while ships linked to the United States, Israel and other "hostile states" are barred.



Iranian officials said measures were in place to counter the pressure and that the country would not be forced into halting production.

NIGC starts restoring war-scarred gas plants; network remains stable

Economy Desk

Iran has begun reconstruction work on two gas refineries damaged during the recent 40-day US-Israeli war that started in late February, while the country's gas network remains stable, the head of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) said.

Saeid Tavakoli, speaking to the Oil Ministry's news outlet SHANA, said parts of Iran's oil and gas infrastructure were hit during the conflict, but integrated management across the ministry had ensured that no consumption restrictions had been imposed so far.

He said four gas refineries in the South Pars region were struck during the war, but operational and technical teams managed to maintain the stability of the gas network. "Based on a managerial deci-

sion, the full reconstruction of two refineries has been assigned to the National Iranian Gas Company. With precise planning, reconstruction work has begun so that these gas refineries become operational within the scheduled timeframe," Tavakoli said.

On fuel storage, Tavakoli said all power plants are currently operating at maximum capacity using natural gas. He added that the company's summer strategy is to optimize the network to minimize the use of liquid fuels in power generation, allowing liquid fuel tanks to remain at full capacity as strategic reserves for winter, when demand is more critical. Separately, Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad said on Tuesday on the sidelines of a meeting with members of Parliament's Energy Committee that reconstruction of the dam-



aged facilities had been put on a fast track and was progressing well, expressing hope that the work would be completed within the planned schedule. On the sidelines of the meeting, the deputy head of the committee Ramazan-Ali Sangdavini said damaged oil facilities will be rebuilt with support from the government and Parliament, adding that the Oil Ministry put on a strong performance during the war.

TPO: Engineering exports hit \$1.8b, up 140% in defiance of sanctions

Economy Desk

Iran's exports of technical and engineering services rose 140% in the last financial year that began on March 21, 2025, reaching \$1.8 billion from \$790 million a year earlier, a senior trade official said, according to Mehr news agency. Sohrab Salimi, director general of knowledge-based products and technical and engineering services at the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO), said such exports are less affected by border, maritime and air sanctions because they are not physically shipped through customs or exit points.

"Service exports have an advantage over goods exports in that they are far less dependent on sectors affected by sanctions," he said, adding that despite developments in the country last year, exports in this sector still recorded a 140% increase.

He said even under more adverse conditions, the sector



could have reached similar levels because pressure tools such as sanctions have limited impact on engineering service exports, which are based on expertise and professional know-how.

Iran's main destinations for technical and engineering service exports include Commonwealth of Independent States countries such as Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, as well as Oman and Iraq, which are considered key markets. Salimi said a projected export

target of \$5 billion in the coming years is achievable provided key requirements are met, including maintaining broad bilateral relations with other countries and restoring normal banking ties, including access to the SWIFT system for financial transfers. He added that some exporters in the sector have faced issues with the Central Bank due to outstanding debts, and resolving these problems would allow them to resume operations and contribute to expanding exports.

Iran to launch forex support to boost production, industries

Economy Desk

Iran will begin a new round of foreign exchange and rial-denominated support to boost production, officials said, following a meeting between the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) governor and the industry minister, according to Tasnim news agency.

At the meeting between Abdolnaser Hemmati and Mohammad Atabak, measures to support manufacturing and industrial units were reviewed, with a focus on eas-

ing access to financing and securing foreign currency for imports.

Hemmati stressed the importance of supporting the production sector, saying rial-denominated loans would be extended to manufacturing units introduced by the Industry Ministry.

He added that the CBI was fully prepared to expand co-operation in supplying and allocating foreign currency for production units, particularly for the import of raw materials, and would provide the

necessary assistance. Participants in the meeting emphasized the need for effective measures to address foreign exchange constraints faced by industrial units to ensure continued operations and production growth. A report was also presented on the financial and currency needs of manufacturing units to sustain output, with officials underscoring the importance of resolving forex-related issues, securing financing and streamlining the lending process.

US 'Freedom Project' in ...

The first and most significant deterrent is their economic ties with Iran. Countries such as

South Korea, Japan, and India

have maintained substantial trade relations with Iran in the past and have sought to preserve at least a minimal level of engagement even during periods of sanctions. Participation in a military coalition against Iran would effectively mean severing these ties and losing future economic opportunities. At a time when many of these countries are seeking to diversify their energy sources and trade partners, this cost is considerable.

The second factor is the reluctance to become directly involved in a military confrontation with Iran. Asian countries in particular have built their diplomatic traditions on non-interference in other regions and avoidance of military alliances. Participation in this project would expose them to the risk of retaliatory attacks, whether in the Strait of Hormuz or elsewhere where their interests are present. This security risk is especially serious for countries with limited military capability to defend their interests beyond their national borders.

The third factor is the unsuccessful track record of similar coalitions in the past. The maritime coalition formed by the US in 2019 to protect shipping in the Persian Gulf received limited support and failed to achieve its ob-

jectives. This experience demonstrated that such coalitions often carry heavy political costs while offering limited operational benefits. Countries therefore prefer to ensure the security of their vessels through bilateral or multilateral arrangements outside a US-led framework.

The fourth factor is domestic pressure and public opinion. In many of these countries, public sentiment is sensitive to military involvement in the Middle East, and governments are reluctant to bear the domestic political costs associated with such participation. Particularly in democratic systems, opposition from parliaments and political parties can pose a serious obstacle.

The fifth factor is concern over the potential negative impact on relations with China. Many Asian countries regard China as their largest trading partner, and Beijing has openly opposed US confrontational policies in the Middle East. Participation in this project may be interpreted as alignment with US strategy against China, thereby placing additional strain on their relations with Beijing.

Impact on Tehran-Washington negotiation deadlock

The "Freedom Project" is unfolding within a complex context of Iran-US relations, marked by multiple layers of tension, mistrust, and at the same time a need for dialogue. Its impact

on Tehran-Washington negotiations can be examined from two opposing perspectives: as a lever of pressure and as a complicating factor.

From the standpoint of US strategy, the project could serve as a tool to increase costs for Iran and create incentives for a return to the negotiating table. On the other hand, it may significantly complicate the negotiating environment and reduce the chances of reaching an agreement. Historical experience in Iran-US relations has shown that unilateral pressure often leads to the hardening of Iran's positions.

This initiative may be perceived as a breach of goodwill, particularly if informal negotiations or backchannel communications are taking place simultaneously. Tehran may interpret the move as a sign of Washington's lack of seriousness in negotiations and, in response, adopt a tougher stance. This could set off a cycle of action and reaction that derails the negotiation process entirely.

Another layer of complexity lies in its impact on mutual trust. Successful negotiations require at least a minimal level of trust between the parties. Military actions, even if limited, undermine this fragile trust. Iran may conclude that the opposing side is pursuing a military rather than a diplomatic solution, which in turn could reduce its willingness to invest in the negotiation process.

US naval blockade unlawful: **Official**

But collecting tolls from ships transiting Strait of Hormuz logical



By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

During these days, the deployment of military forces of the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) within the waters of the Middle East and the claim of imposing restrictions upon the transit of commercial vessels, particularly Iranian oil tankers, has created an atmosphere of profound uncertainty over the shipping industry. These measures are being executed notwithstanding the fact that Iranian authorities have consistently emphasized the unlawful nature of such behaviors from the perspective of the law of the sea and international conventions.

According to international law, especially the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the regulations of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the imposition of a naval blockade by an extra-regional power, absent a delegation of authority from the United Nations Security Council, is deemed devoid of legal legitimacy. Legal scholars maintain that such actions not only contravene the principles of innocent passage through international straits and waterways but could also place the safety of navigation and the supply chain of essential commodities, such as medicines, foodstuffs, and fuel, in grave jeopardy.

Within this intricate context, the Iranian shipping industry, notwithstanding external pressures and escalating operational costs, has endeavored to sustain its maritime transits. Nevertheless, issues such as war risk insurance, heightened vessel costs, the seizure of certain watercraft, and the anxiety resulting from foreign military presence have generated daily challenges for ship owners, crews, and logistics operators.

In this regard, Iran Daily has conducted an exclusive interview with Masoud Polmeh, secretary-general of the Iranian Shipping Association, to explore the legal and practical dimensions of the naval blockade, the status of Iranian vessel transits, the costs imposed upon shipping companies, the legal measures undertaken in international tribunals, and furthermore, Iran's stance concerning the management of the Strait of Hormuz.

IRAN DAILY: How do you assess the naval blockade of Iran by the United States, and fundamentally, what situation, challenges, and restrictions do Iranian vessels confront under current circumstances?

POLMEH: Permit me to state unequivocally, from the outset, that the subject of a naval blockade of Iran by the United States of America constitutes an entirely illegitimate measure. According to the law of the sea, this action possesses no legal validity whatsoever; neither from the stand-



point of binding international conventions nor from that of United Nations resolutions does any legitimacy for such a blockade exist. The United States has, in truth, acted once again in accordance with its self-appointed role as the world's police. In effect, a naval blockade is a traditional instrument that the Americans employ to exert pressure upon any nation that does not behave according to their desires. Through this blockade, they have endeavored, by leveraging their military forces, to apply maximum economic pressure.

So, then, you mean that under international maritime rules and treaties, and even within the laws of armed conflict, something called a "naval blockade" in this form has not been authorized?

Such a thing does not exist under any circumstance. According to the mandates of the IMO, not only has the imposition of such behavior not been authorized, but these types of actions have been explicitly prohibited. Shipping must, in the ordinary course, serve to protect the interests of nations, and no impediment to the transit of commercial vessels carrying humanitarian goods, foodstuffs, medicines, and other essential items should exist. Vessels must conduct their commercial activities freely. This is separate from the regime of "innocent passage," which possesses its own rules and whereby nations may apply pressure solely upon coastal states within a specified zone. However, for the United States to arrive from thousands of kilometers away and take such an action within our region's waters is an unlawful act devoid of international legitimacy.

With this description, what effects have the actions of the United States produced, and what has been Iran's reaction to this blockade?

The measures that the United States undertakes undoubtedly produce effects. However, we have adopted a reciprocal ap-



The illustration showing the fictional Uncle Sam awarding "World Piracy Prize" to US President Donald Trump references the fact that on May 2, 2026, Trump said the US navy acted "like pirates" as he described an operation seizing a ship.

● SOCIAL MEDIA

proach, and naturally, in response to this blockade and to secure the rights of our people, we are preventing the commercial transits of nations hostile to the Islamic Republic of Iran through the Strait of Hormuz. Consequently, due to this American military action, we are witnessing an increase in the price of oil, fuel, and energy globally, a phenomenon that has placed a double burden upon the entire world economy and has caused nations dependent upon the commerce and energy of the Persian Gulf to experience difficult conditions.

One of the most adversely affected nations in this blockade is the United States itself because the American economy is profoundly dependent upon Persian Gulf commerce, whether in terms of investors, producers, the stock exchange, and, most importantly, the matter of oil and energy, which subjects the consumer fuel rate in the United States to fluctuation and price increases every day.

Under such circumstances, how do you assess the status



One of the most adversely affected nations in this blockade is the United States itself because the American economy is profoundly dependent upon Persian Gulf commerce, whether in terms of investors, producers, the stock exchange, and, most importantly, the matter of oil and energy, which subjects the consumer fuel rate in the United States to fluctuation and price increases every day.

of Iranian vessel transits? Has the naval blockade succeeded in disrupting our activities?

In aggregate, our maritime logistics activities, despite the claim of an American naval blockade, continue. With the support of the armed forces, a portion of our watercraft are safely traversing this geographical blockade that has been established at sea. Furthermore, a segment of our tankers has also crossed the blockade line. Of course, another segment has remained inactive due to CENTCOM pressures or has refrained from transiting owing to concerns about potential military confrontations. However, in sum, it must be stated that the exceptionally dire scenario which the United States had envisioned through the establishment of this blockade has not materialized. At the same time, naturally, the risk of shipping operations has increased, and the owners of foreign vessels transiting this region have become concerned. So, the naval blockade has certainly been effective in raising the price of oil, and this blockade complements American military actions, which have produced del-



The screengrab shows US Marines boarding an Iranian-flagged vessel, the *Touska*, within the Gulf of Oman, on May 19, 2026, after departing from the *USS Tripoli*, an amphibious assault ship, via helicopter to intercept the container ship.

● US CENTCOM



eterious economic outcomes for nations and even for the United States itself.

Could this naval blockade expose Iran's economy to a serious and irremediable bottleneck?

That is not at all the case. We possess several thousand kilometers of land borders, and we have another waterway available to us in the north of our country. We maintain connections with seven nations via road and rail, and in parallel with these connections, we also sustain maritime links with five countries. We have commercial relations with China via rail.

It is quite certain that this blockade cannot produce the effect that the United States desires. For many years, we have kept the North-South and East-West corridors active; corridors that support and sustain our commercial activities alongside the high seas. Although a larger volume of goods is usually transported to ports via maritime transport, road and rail can compensate for this gap to an acceptable extent. The very quantity of goods moved via road and rail suffices to nullify the destructive effects that the United States and the Zionist regime anticipate from a naval blockade.

What costs have the restrictions resulting from the naval blockade imposed upon Iranian shipping companies? And are international and domestic insurance companies capable of covering these losses?

Costs vary for vessels and, naturally, change according to the type of operation a vessel performs, its size, and the kind of cargo transported (ordinary goods, general cargo, dangerous goods). Accordingly, the regional insurance rate is likewise variable, and, naturally, during wartime conditions, the insurance rate increases.

The rate for maritime operations, depending on the type of operation, has increased by at least 100%, from fuel costs to vessel duties and tolls to insurance premiums, and on long routes, this figure reaches 300% to 400%. Naturally, insurance companies also encounter difficulties in covering these damages because, during wartime, due to the elevated risk, some insurance companies refuse to accept war risk, and consequently, compensation for losses must be administered reciprocally in a managed fashion.

Given the unlawful action of the United States in seizing certain Iranian vessels, has any specific legal action been undertaken by Iran or by shipping companies to file a lawsuit in international courts, or do you have a plan in this regard?

Yes, certainly. Preliminary actions and complaints have been lodged via diplomatic channels, as well as through organizations that conduct international professional and trade union activities, in The Hague and also at the IMO. Even the Iranian Shipping Association

itself has pursued these complaints. These complaints have been raised under the headings of "imposing navigation restrictions" and "unlawful seizure of vessels". Naturally, for as long as the seizure of vessels continues, all material and moral rights of ship owners, cargo owners, and crew must be considered and preserved, and the protection of these persons and properties is the responsibility of the party that has executed the seizure. The Americans' action in seizing vessels is, from an ethical standpoint, nothing other than "piracy"; however, from a legal perspective, this term is imprecise because piracy is not ordinarily carried out in an official manner with a documented identity.

In response to the American blockade, Iran has also raised the issue of closing the Strait of Hormuz. Some believe this action is likewise indefensible from a legal standpoint. On the other hand, the Strait of Hormuz is considered part of Iran's territorial waters. Please explain what legal regime gov-



erns international straits and high seas, and how do you distinguish between the two?

We have a convention from the year 1982 of the IMO that the Islamic Republic of Iran has still neither signed nor ratified in the Parliament. Nevertheless, even based upon that same convention, navigation in coastal zones must be conduct-

ed as "innocent passage".

In the Strait of Hormuz, we have in practice only prevented hostile nations; that is to say, we control vessels that intend to conduct military activities against us or naval operations harmful to Iran's sovereignty and territorial integrity. However, this does not signify the complete closure of the Strait



USS Rafael Peralta (DDG 115), near what the US Central Command said was a vessel attempting to sail to an Iranian port, enforces the US blockade on Iranian ports, at an unknown location in April 2026.

● US CENTCOM

of Hormuz. At present, many vessels from various countries, including Turkey, Iraq, India, Pakistan, or even Qatar, following a behavioral modification that occurred, are transiting the Strait of Hormuz.

On the other hand, the Islamic Republic of Iran, under a specific legal process and regime, and in cooperation with Oman, manages the transit through the Strait of Hormuz. We do not claim to impose unilaterally our rights upon all international waterways and expect other nations to comply; rather, our actions in the Strait of Hormuz are based solely upon the interests of regional nations, the prevention of transit by harmful vessels, and the securing of the rights of the Iranian people.

Another topic raised these days concerns the collection of tolls upon vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz. Does Iran possess the right to collect tolls in order to provide security or compensate for environmental pollution caused by vessel transit through its territorial waters?

Yes, absolutely. The conventions ratified by the IMO, which operates under the United Nations, have rendered mandatory for all IMO member states certain requirements for environmental protection, prevention of water pollution, control of vessels' ballast water, and prevention of the discharge of garbage and vessel waste into the sea. Accordingly, when we speak of tolls, we mean the costs of monitoring and enforcing the implementation of these very conventions.

It is natural that any vessel intending to transit this region must pay the costs associated with the protection and safeguarding of the environment. From air pollution, such as the non-use of high-sulfur fuels, to water pollution resulting from oil spills or vessel fuel discharges, all such phenomena are forms of pollution, and their control and remediation entail specific costs. For these costs to be borne by the nation using the region's waters, the collection of tolls is an entirely reasonable and logical matter.

Trump's Iran blockade snatches defeat from jaws of victory



By Trita Parsi

Executive VP of Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft

OPINION

It appears Donald Trump once again snatched defeat from the jaws of victory by heeding the hawkish counsel of the warmongers at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD).

As I have argued before, the fragile cease-fire disproportionately favored the United States over Iran: Trump secured his central objective — a swift exit from a costly war — while Iran forfeited its primary source of leverage, namely the inflationary pressure of elevated oil prices. Tehran, by contrast, remained unable to achieve its core objective — meaningful sanctions relief — without entering a difficult diplomatic process with Washington. The asymmetry was stark: Trump could afford strategic patience, whereas Iran risked squandering the most consequential gains the conflict could have yielded if negotiations faltered or collapsed.

In short, this emerging status quo could have constituted a quiet but decisive victory for Trump. Yes, Iran would retain control over the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz — but it does so today as well and would do so in almost any scenario. But the status quo would have seen oil prices drop as the Iranians would allow tankers to transit in order to collect fees. And as long as oil prices came down, Trump's position at home and vis-à-vis Iran would have strengthened.

But then Trump committed a familiar and consequential error. Once again, he followed the advice of Israel and one of its key supporters in Washington, the FDD advocacy group.

Strangulation of Iran: take 5023

FDD argued that blockading the Persian Gulf would swift-

ly cripple the Iranian economy and coerce Tehran into capitulation, allowing Trump to achieve through economic strangulation what he had failed to secure through military force. In short, it was sold to him as a silver bullet. More on that later.

According to this logic, the blockade would "effectively zero out" Iran's export revenues within days, inflicting losses of nearly \$500 million per day. With oil exports halted, Iran's limited storage capacity would be filled within weeks, forcing the costly and technically damaging shutdown of its oil wells. This, FDD claimed, would dramatically reverse the strategic balance — transforming the Strait of Hormuz from a perceived Iranian asset into a crippling Achilles' heel, while

handing Washington the invaluable advantage of time. Pressure on Iran would escalate sharply while pressure on the United States would rapidly dissipate. Trump was fully on board. His long-sought subjugation of Iran suddenly appeared tantalizingly within reach. "The blockade is genius," the president told reporters. "Now, they have to cry uncle; that's all they have to do. Just say, 'We give up.'" (Notably, an FDD staffer has reportedly since joined Steve Witkoff's team.)

Predictably, the opposite occurred. FDD's confident calculations and tidy logic were, as so often, rooted more in wishful thinking than in hard reality. By its own projections, Iran should have exhausted its storage capacity nearly a week ago. Yet satellite im-



There is a pathology in US policy on Iran that transcends administrations and party affiliations: The incessant search for an escalatory silver bullet that brings Iran to its knees, forces it to capitulate, and enables the US to assert its superpower dominance and avoid a compromise with the Islamic Republic. Countless diplomatic opportunities have been sacrificed, and face-saving exit ramps have been burnt in the process. Yet, the quest continues.



The illustration depicts US President Donald Trump wearing a military helmet backward that has blinded him.

● THE ECONOMIST/GETTY IMAGES

agency shows Tehran still actively loading oil onto tankers at Kharg Island. While the blockade has undeniably increased economic pressure, there is no sign of the acute storage crisis — or the cascading collapse — FDD confidently promised Trump.

But by targeting Iran's oil exports, Trump did more than complicate an already fragile diplomatic pathway — he tightened global supply and drove prices upward. In fact, thanks to the blockade, oil prices now exceed the levels seen during the war itself. Exxon's CEO told shareholders recently that gasoline prices are poised to rise even further, noting that "the market hasn't seen the full impact of [the Iran conflict] yet." Meanwhile, Joe Kent, Trump's former director of the National Counterterrorism Center, cautions that "the blockade is now triggering a global fertilizer shortage that will cause major food security crises and potential famines." In short: the desperately needed pressure release Trump secured through the cease-fire has been entirely undone by FDD's vaunted silver-bullet blockade.

The lure of the silver bullet

There is a pathology in US policy on Iran that transcends administrations and party affiliations: The incessant search for an escalatory silver bullet that brings Iran to its knees, forces it to capitulate, and enables the US to assert its superpower dominance and avoid a compromise with the Islamic Republic.

Across 47 years, the hunt for this fabled silver bullet has echoed on — yet nothing answers back. Countless diplomatic opportunities have been sacrificed, and face-saving exit ramps have been burnt in the process. Yet, the quest continues.

The demand for Iranian capitulation and the enduring faith in elusive silver bullets are deeply intertwined. In January, Trump believed that the mere threat of military force would compel Tehran to surrender. After issuing a series of increasingly explicit warnings that Iran pointedly ig-

nored, he proposed a calibrated strike — one to which Tehran should respond symbolically by targeting an empty American base. Iran refused outright, making clear that any attack would trigger a full-scale war.

Interpreting this defiance as a failure of credibility rather than a rejection of coercion, Trump escalated. He ordered a substantial buildup of military assets in the region, convinced that a critical mass of force would finally deliver the decisive breakthrough — the long-sought silver bullet. It didn't. Indeed, Witkoff revealed in an interview that Trump was frustrated that, despite his military threats, Iran had still not "capitulated".

Clearly, more escalation was needed. The next imagined silver bullet was the assassination of Iran's Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei. Midway through the war, a GCC official told me that Trump had assured regional leaders the conflict would last no more than 100 hours. Israeli media similarly reported that he told Britain's Keir Starmer it would be over within three days. The logic was stark: the killing of Khamenei would trigger either the regime's rapid implosion or its immediate capitulation. It proved to be yet another illusory silver bullet.

Nor did the sweeping bombardment of Iran's civilian infrastructure deliver the long-sought breakthrough. A Bloomberg analysis found that only 32% of the damaged buildings were linked to military targets — the overwhelming majority were civilian. Even this devastating and indiscriminate campaign failed to produce the decisive outcome its architects had promised.

The blockade-on-the-blockade is merely the latest in a long line of delusional silver bullets that American presidents have chased instead of pursuing far less costly and far more effective diplomacy. I suspect that a stunning number of those silver bullets were cooked up by FDD.

The article first appeared on the author's Substack.



U23 World Championships: Iran demands UWW action over US visa complications

Sports Desk

Alireza Dabir, the chairman of the Iranian Wrestling Federation (IAWFIR), has called on United World Wrestling (UWW) to ensure smooth participation for his country at the upcoming U23 World Championships – starting October 12 in Las Vegas, Nevada, United States.

In a phone conversation with UWW President Nenad Lalović on Tuesday, Dabir urged the sport's international governing body to show "special oversight" on the matter amid an ongoing visa controversy for Iranian athletes.

With Iran and the United States engaged in a military conflict since February 28, potential entry denial for Iranians – who have completed their military service in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) – at sporting events has been a major focus of media coverage in recent weeks. This issue has been most significant regarding the FIFA World Cup, which will be co-hosted by the United States, Mexico, and Canada in June and July.

While U.S. President Donald Trump said in March that he considers it not "appropriate" for Iranian



Iranian freestyle wrestler Sina Khalili (blue) is seen in action at the U23 World Championships in Novi Sad, Serbia, on October 26, 2025.

players to visit his country "for their own life and safety," U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said last week that Iran's players will be welcome, but indicated that some members of the Iranian Football Federation who "have ties to the IRGC" may experience difficulties.

"Iran is the world champion in different age-group categories in both freestyle and Greco-Roman wrestling, and a global powerhouse with a passionate wrestling public," the IAWFIR quoted Dabir as saying in his conversation with the UWW's Serbian chief.

"If the United States creates visa problems for our team, we – along with other wrestling nations – will demand a review of the country's bid to host the Senior World Championships in 2027," added the former world champion. Iran bagged a total of 12

medals – including five golds – to claim the Greco-Roman team title, while finishing runner-up to Team USA in the freestyle event at the U23 Worlds last year in Novi Sad, Serbia. Elsewhere in the hour-long conversation, Dabir delivered a stark report on

war-inflicted damage to the national teams' training facilities. "Heavy damage has been done, but reconstruction is proceeding at full speed," Dabir said, adding that 29 wrestlers unfortunately were killed during five-and-a-half weeks of U.S.-Israeli airstrikes.

Guarantees required

Meanwhile, Mehdi Taj, the chief of the Iranian Football Federation (FFIRI), says the country's preparations for the World Cup remain on track, but its participation will depend on a guarantee of respect for the Iranian armed forces by tournament co-hosts the United States. The FFIRI will seek reassurance from FIFA that the U.S. will not insult the IRGC during the World Cup, Taj said on Tuesday.

"[The] Americans, if they guarantee not to insult our military institutions and the IRGC, we'll go," Taj told state broadcaster IRIB.

"If they give such a guarantee that an incident like Canada doesn't happen and they definitely assure it, we will go," he added.

Taj – a former IRGC member – was referring to an incident that took place at Toronto's Pearson Airport last week, when he and two of

his colleagues at the federation abruptly left Canada, abandoning their onward trip to Vancouver for Friday's FIFA Congress.

While several reports suggested that the Iranian officials were denied entry despite holding valid visas, the FFIRI said in a statement that it was the three-man delegation's own decision to "return to Türkiye due to the first available flight due to the unacceptable behavior of immigration officials at the airport and the insult to one of the most honorable organs of the Iranian nation's armed forces."

Upon arrival in Tehran, Taj said he will seek answers regarding certain issues about Iran's World Cup participation in a meeting with FIFA officials in Zurich later this month.

Blaming the international governing body for "being intimidated by the United States," Taj urged the organization to show "clarity" over the uncertain situation surrounding the national team. Iran is set to begin its Group G campaign at the global showpiece 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.

In-form Sayyadmanesh remains in hunt for World Cup ticket

Sports Desk

Allahyar Sayyadmanesh will hope his run of impressive performances in the Belgian top flight convinces national team head coach Amir Qalenoeei to name the striker in the Team Melli roster for the upcoming FIFA World Cup, which starts June 11 in North America.

The 24-year-old striker has produced some of the best football of his career for KVC Westerlo this season, bagging seven goals and five assists in 29 appearances in the Jupiler Pro League. He delivered a two-goal contribution last week as Westerlo overcame a three-goal deficit to play to a 3-3 draw at home against OH Leuven in the league's European playoffs, remaining in contention for a place in continental club competition next season.

Playing as a left-sided wingback in a 3-4-3 system – a testament to his tactical flexibility – Sayyadmanesh earned a match-high rating of 8.6 and a place in the league's Team of the Week for the third time this season. His numbers have trans-

lated to a direct goal contribution roughly every 207 minutes – an impressive figure for the Iranian, who struggled with consistency over past campaigns with Fenerbahçe, Istanbulspor, Zorya Luhansk, and Hull City since leaving Esteghlal in 2019 to embark on the next chapter of his career in European club football.



KVC WESTERLO

Discovered during the 2017 U-17 World Cup in India, where he scored against Guinea, Mexico, and Germany during his team's run to the quarterfinals, Sayyadmanesh went on to become Iran's youngest-ever goalscorer. He netted against Syria under then-Belgian head coach Marc Wilmots at just 17 years, 11 months,

and eight days in his senior international debut in June 2019.

That goal has remained the sole strike of his senior international career, which includes just nine caps – the last one coming in a cameo appearance in a friendly against Tanzania in September 2025.

However, with Qalenoeei facing significant ques-

tions about his squad selection for the global showpiece, Sayyadmanesh's recent club form has reignited discussions about his potential. While players in Iran's domestic league have been without competitive action since February amid the country's military conflict with the

United States and Israel, the head coach will likely have to build his team around overseas players. Recent setbacks, however, have added further blows to his preparation program – beyond ongoing issues related to securing friendly matches and visa approvals for players who completed their military service in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps – with less than 40 days until the Group G opener against New Zealand in Los Angeles.

Lech Poznań's winger Ali Gholizadeh has been ruled out of the World Cup after suffering a ligament injury in the Polish league last week, while captain Alireza Jahanbakhsh faces a race against time to be fit for the showpiece. Prolific striker Sardar Azmoun, meanwhile, is unlikely to be part of the squad due to his recent off-field issues.

With all the shortcomings in Qalenoeei's way, the versatile Sayyadmanesh – who has proven capable of playing on the flanks – has definitely made a case for being a surprise inclusion in the Team Melli roster for the World Cup.

AVC Men's Volleyball Champions League:

Foolad to chase third continental glory despite wartime challenges

Sports Desk

Despite Iranian sport grappling with wartime circumstances in the country, Foolad Sirjan will chase a third title in six editions at the upcoming AVC Men's Volleyball Champions League when it begins its campaign against Jakarta Garuda Jaya in Pontianak, Indonesia, next Thursday. According to the tournament regulations, the pool phase will be played in a do-or-die knockout format.

A victory over the host nation's favorite will see the Iranian champion take on the winner of the game between the other Indonesian outfit in the tournament, Jakarta Bhayangkara Presisi, or the Japanese S.V. League representative – which is yet to be confirmed – in the semifinals two days later.

Coached by former national team head coach Behrouz Ataei, Foolad Sirjan is set to leave Istanbul, where the club held its training camp in recent weeks, for Indonesia later today.

Ali Ramezani, Ashkan Haqdoost, Mohammad Valizadeh, Amirhossein Tokhteh,



volleyball.ir

Ali Shafiei, Mahdi Marandi, Rasoul Shahsavari, Pouria Hosseinkhanzadeh, Amirhossein Khajeh-Khalili, Esmaeil Mosafer, Amirhossein Saadati, and Ali Hajipour are the members of the Iranian club at the Asian showpiece.

Bulgarian world-class outside hitter Aleksandar Nikolov has joined Foolad on a short-term loan contract for the tournament and is set to join up with his new teammates in Indonesia after completing his commitments with Italian Volley Lube in the European club season.

A semifinalist last year in Japan, Foolad Sirjan enters the

Asian competition as one of the favorites, carrying the weight of Iran's strong volleyball reputation. With a mix of experienced national team players and the firepower of Nikolov to come, Ataei will be confident his squad can navigate the pool stage and challenge for continental glory.

The winner of the tournament will earn a spot at the FIVB Club World Championship later this year. Foolad made it to the last four at the global showpiece in 2024, before ultimately settling for bronze thanks to a victory over Volley Lube in the third-place playoff in Uberlândia, Brazil.

Archaeological excavation begins in Zarqan

Iranica Desk

An archaeological excavation project has begun in the city of Zarqan with the aim of identifying, documenting, and defining the boundaries and buffer zones of its historical sites.

The head of the archaeological team Ebrahim Rostaei-Farsi stated that the excavation is being conducted under the supervision of the Research Institute of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, the Archaeological Research Center, and the Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization of Fars Province, with financial support from the Zarqan Municipality. The project includes test trenching to identify cultural layers and architectural remains from various historical periods within the city's historic fabric. He added that preliminary studies have revealed significant evidence of human settlement in the area, which requires more detailed fieldwork and excavation.



Rostaei-Farsi also highlighted the unique location of Zarqan, noting that its historical remains lie in proximity to Persepolis and prehistoric civilizations. He emphasized that

this makes the excavation and the determination of protected zones even more critical for preserving the city's historical identity and its urban heritage.

He further stated that all phases of the excavation will be carried out under the direct supervision of experts and in full coordination with the Cultural Heritage Protection Unit of the Fars

Province's Cultural Heritage Organization.

Zarqan is a historic city in southern Iran, just northeast of Shiraz. Its location places it within one of the most culturally significant regions of Iran, an area long associated with ancient Persian civilization.

One of Zarqan's most notable features is its proximity to Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire founded by Darius the Great. Because of this, the wider region around Zarqan has been continuously inhabited for thousands of years, with layers of settlement dating back to prehistoric times.

Historically, Zarqan developed as a small but strategically placed settlement along regional routes connecting Shiraz to northern and eastern regions. Over time, it evolved into a local center for agriculture and trade. The surrounding plains are relatively fertile compared to much of the region, supporting

crops and orchards that have sustained local communities for generations.

In terms of cultural heritage, Zarqan contains a historic urban fabric with traditional houses, narrow streets, and remnants of older architectural styles. However, like many growing towns, parts of this historic fabric have been affected by modern development, which is one reason archaeological projects like the current excavation are important — they help identify and protect what remains of the city's past.

Today, Zarqan is also influenced by its closeness to Shiraz, benefiting from economic and infrastructural connections while still retaining aspects of its local identity. The ongoing archaeological work could significantly enhance understanding of how this town fits into the broader historical landscape of ancient Fars and the civilizations surrounding Persepolis.

Kan Gonbad site yields bronze age finds

Iranica Desk

A prehistoric archaeology graduate has said that the ancient site of Kan Gonbad in Iran's Ilam Province, dating back approximately 2,500 to 2,600 BCE, has attracted scholarly attention due to a range of significant discoveries, including bronze artifacts, handmade pottery, and engraved beads. Habibollah Mahmoudian said that the historic site is located in the southwest of Ilam, along a secondary road leading to the villages of Mar Barreh and Gol Gol in the Malekshahi region,

near the northern slopes of Mount Nakhjir. The cemetery has been excavated by an archaeological team from Iran's Cultural Heritage Organization, with multiple burial sites examined across four excavation trenches. He noted that two main types of pottery were identified at the site: plain and decorated wares. The plain pottery is mostly red, with some examples in black or darker tones, and appears to have been handmade. Small bowls, jars, and some handled vessels were among the ceramic objects uncovered.

Highlighting special finds, Mahmoudian referred to a cylindrical bead made of greenish stone, measuring 22mm in height and 9mm in diameter. The bead features an engraving of a bull with raised horns standing in front of a tree. He also explained that necklaces discovered at the site were made of stone and shell beads, including both fine and coarse agate pieces. Among the stone objects, only half of a fossilized sedimentary bowl was recovered from the cemetery. The archaeological team estimates that the site dates

to between 2600 and 2500 BCE.

Mahmoudian added that a large portion of the artifacts discovered in the cemetery are bronze objects, including daggers, blades, chisels, hooks, awls, bracelets, and metal rings.

He further noted that the name Kan Gonbad comes from two Kurdish words: Kan, meaning house, and Gonbad, meaning hidden treasure. According to local beliefs, the site is thought to be the burial place of an ancient royal treasure, concealed within the mountains to protect it from invaders.



● ISNA

Shaneh Tarash village eyes UN tourism list

Iranica Desk

A global initiative launched about five years ago by UN Tourism has been redefining how rural destinations gain international recognition. Centered on the vitality of rural life and the active participation of local communities, the program has brought new attention to villages that embody sustainable development. Among Iran's contenders, Shaneh Tarash village in Tonekabon, Mazandaran Province, is now regarded by experts as meeting the criteria for inclusion on the list of the world's best tourism villages. Shaneh Tarash's candidacy is no coincidence. For years, the village has pursued a path of sustainable development built on community engagement and facilitation efforts. This long-term approach has enabled it to secure a place among eight Iranian nominees for global tourism village recognition, relying heavily on social capital and grassroots initiatives, according to IRNA.

Experts attribute the village's growing reputation in organic tourism to several key developments: the spontaneous formation of an integrated network of eco-lodges, the revival of forgotten handicrafts, the establishment of a local museum,

the restoration of traditional architecture, and the completion of a tourism value chain. Today, Shaneh Tarash is seen as a model of "conservation-through-utilization," where the protection of natural and local resources is directly tied to the livelihoods and economic benefits of residents — an approach that strengthens both sustainability and competitiveness.

Speaking at a recent meeting on the village's nomination process, Mehdi Baharvand, head of Office for Development of Attractions and Tourism Products at Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, stated that Shaneh Tarash has reached a level of

maturity due to its successful organic destination management and continuous community participation in the revival of handicrafts and the development of eco-tourism.

He highlighted the evolving criteria of UN Tourism, noting that over the past five years, the organization has prioritized not only environmental and conservation indicators but also development-oriented approaches driven by local communities. The ultimate goal, he said, is to ensure that residents benefit directly from tourism while transforming villages into international destinations.

Baharvand also stressed that, with a limited timeframe re-

maining for the final dossier submission, efforts should focus less on heavy infrastructure projects and more on producing narrative-driven and well-documented content. He emphasized that multimedia presence and digital visibility are crucial evaluation factors, as international judges often begin by searching online for credible and multilingual information about candidate villages.

Local cooperation has also played a vital role. According to officials, coordination between national bodies and local institutions has accelerated efforts to address shortcomings and meet global standards. The involvement of municipal authorities

and natural resource agencies reflects an unprecedented level of institutional collaboration.

Tonekabon's mayor described the initiative as a unifying force, bringing together different agencies in pursuit of a shared objective. He noted that such cooperation would not typically occur without the momentum created by the global recognition process. Even beyond the final outcome, this synergy is expected to enhance the village's development trajectory and help it meet international benchmarks.

Mohammad-Ebrahim Larijani further explained that the criteria set by UN Tourism are rooted in the authentic flow of rural

life. While achieving global standards may be challenging, he said, the essence lies in preserving local ecosystems, ensuring communities benefit from tourism revenues, and maintaining traditional lifestyles, crafts, and architecture.

Nestled in the pristine natural landscape of Tonekabon, Shaneh Tarash is more than just a rural settlement — it is a living repository of handicrafts and intangible cultural heritage from Mazandaran. Its potential global recognition represents not merely a symbolic title, but a unique opportunity to showcase the tourism potential of western Mazandaran, stimulate economic growth, and preserve a heritage passed down through generations.

Importantly, the village's nomination is part of a process under UN Tourism and should not be confused with listings by UNESCO. While UNESCO focuses primarily on safeguarding tangible and intangible heritage, UN Tourism emphasizes villages that leverage tourism as a driver of sustainable development, job creation, and the preservation of local lifestyles. This distinction underscores Shaneh Tarash's ambition — not as a static museum, but as a vibrant, living village poised for global recognition.



● IRNA

Heritage ownership reform targets long-standing gaps in cultural asset protection

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri on Wednesday called for a nationwide drive to formalize the legal and registration status of historic properties, describing it as a sovereign priority to protect public assets and prevent ownership disputes. Speaking during a visit to the ministry's parliamentary, legal and provincial affairs department, Salehi-Amiri said a number of heritage properties still lack clear legal designa-

tion, a gap that could trigger overlapping claims and undermine public rights, CHTN reported. "Resolving the legal status of these assets is essential to prevent violation of public rights," he said, stressing the need for "measurable" and outcome-oriented action. He stressed that closer coordination with key state bodies, including parliament, the judiciary, and the national registry authorities, to accelerate case resolution and reinforce legal clarity. Without such institutional synergies, he warned, broader cultural

mandates would face "serious hurdles." The minister framed the initiative as part of a results-driven governance approach, urging that all legal and administrative efforts yield tangible progress in safeguarding national heritage. He also called for the expedited settlement of dormant legal cases tied to historical properties, describing their resolution as critical to enhancing transparency over state ownership and preserving the country's cultural legacy. Salehi-Amiri added that prop-



Iran's Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Reza Salehi-Amiri (c) attends a visit to the ministry's parliamentary, legal and provincial affairs department in Tehran on May 6, 2026.
● CHTN

erties in legal limbo must be addressed within a defined timeframe through official title deeds, judicial rulings, or lawful agreements with private owners. Such measures, he said, would help lift uncertainty and ensure the protection of Iran's historical assets under clear legal frameworks.



Iran's civilization 'will endure against all attempts,' Nassirian mocks US threats



Arts & Culture Desk

Veteran stage and screen actor Ali Nassirian said on Wednesday that Iran's civilization will "endure," invoking the country's deep cultural inheritance in response to recent hostile rhetoric from Washington, including threats issued in early April. Speaking in Tehran, Nassirian said repeated attempts by foreign powers across history to erase Iran had failed, stressing that the nation's cultural foundations remain intact. "Iran is not perishable," he said. "Many came, from Mongols to others, and sought to destroy it. They could not." His remarks follow a series of statements by

US President Donald Trump, who in an April 1 televised address from the White House said Washington would "bring them back to the stone ages," and later warned of sweeping destruction if Tehran did not comply with US demands. The comments drew sharp reactions across Iran's cultural and public spheres, IRNA reported. Nassirian framed resilience as rooted in a millennia-old civilizational continuum rather than physical infrastructure alone. "Even if buildings are damaged, they can be rebuilt," he said. "What does not vanish is a civilization sustained by culture." Citing canonical figures of Persian literature, he

pointed to Ferdowsi's 'Shahnameh' (Book of Kings) and the works of Sa'adi, Hafez and Rumi as enduring pillars of identity. He also highlighted the aesthetic legacy of Nasta'liq calligraphy, describing it as a "centuries-old model of beauty" that continues to inform artistic practice. The actor drew a contrast between generational experiences, noting that while younger Iranians often engage with national history through education and media, older generations carry lived memories of upheaval and resistance, including the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War. He added that many artists have continued to express solidarity through their work despite what he described as "silence" from some public figures. "Those who understand Iranian art from within," he said, "carry this civilization forward." "We are not a 250-year-old nation," Nassirian said. "Our civilizational roots stretch back at least three millennia. That is why Iran remains."

Screens fill again in Tehran as cinema represents post-conflict social outlet

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's cinema sector is "gradually returning to normal life" following wartime disruptions, the head of the Cinema Organization of Iran said Wednesday after senior cultural officials toured a damaged Tehran movie complex, marking efforts to revive public entertainment and social cohesion. Raed Faridzadeh, head of the Cinema Organization, visited the Shokufeh Cinema in central Tehran alongside Habibollah Ilbeigi, head of Shahr Cinema Institute, filmmaker Rasoul Sadrameli and producer Ali Sartipi. The venue sustained significant damage during what officials described as the "third imposed war." Faridzadeh praised media coverage during the conflict and acknowledged damage to cultural infrastructure. "Tehran, which bore the heaviest burden, saw part of its cultural centers affected," he said, noting that Shokufeh "suffered the largest share of destruction among cultural and production facilities." Despite the disruption, he stressed that cinema activity never fully stopped. "Cinema was not completely shut down during the bombardments, either in Tehran or in other cities," he said. Faridzadeh pointed to a rebound in attendance, citing a recent daily audience figure of 96,000, the highest recorded since the start of the year. "This shows cinema is slowly returning to its natural life," he said.



Raed Faridzadeh, head of the Cinema Organization of Iran, tours the renovated Shokufeh Cinema in central Tehran on May 6, 2026.
● IRNA

He added that films reflecting wartime conditions continued screening during the conflict, while comedy titles have recently re-entered circulation and additional releases are expected in the coming weeks. "The screening cycle is returning to its normal rhythm," he said. The official emphasized cinema's role in post-crisis recovery, saying there is a "serious need for togetherness and social vitality" after the war, a demand he believes the film sector can help meet. "Cinema must fill the gap of hope and social energy," he said. On controversial film releases such as 'Shishlik' and 'The Killer and the Savage', Faridzadeh said their screening depends on legal procedures. "Any film that has received production permits must go through its

lawful process," he said, adding that unresolved issues must be addressed within regulatory frameworks. He also highlighted upcoming plans for children's cinema following recent incidents affecting minors, calling them "the most vulnerable group in wartime conditions." He said new films for young audiences will soon enter circulation. On ticket pricing reforms, Faridzadeh defended a flexible pricing model, arguing it remains below inflation levels and was delayed due to wartime sensitivities.

Iran-Italy short film 'One of Them' enters Lanzarote competition in Spain



Arts & Culture Desk

A Iran-Italy co-produced short film 'One of Them' has been selected for the international competition section of the 26th Lanzarote International Film Festival in Spain, marking the work's continued trajectory on the global festival circuit. Directed and written by Mostafa Vaziri and produced by Hossein Kavand in collaboration with Italy's

Lights On production company, the short will compete in the festival's official selection in Arrecife, the capital of Lanzarote in Spain's Canary Islands, from May 13 to May 23, ILNA reported on Wednesday. The Lanzarote festival is regarded as one of Spain's established platforms for short-form cinema and serves as a qualifying event for the Goya Awards, Spain's premier national film honors. The 26th edition

will host a diverse lineup of international entries spanning countries including the Philippines, Brazil, Peru, Belgium, France, Serbia, Russia and Italy, alongside the Iranian-Italian production. 'One of Them' has steadily expanded its international footprint through multiple festival appearances. It previously earned a nomination for Best International Film at Kosovo's DokuFest in its world premiere run.

It later advanced to the main competition of the HollyShorts Film Festival in the United States, where it was shortlisted among the top 10 films from 427 entries for Best Short Film. The project also featured in the competition section of Georgia's BIAFF festival. International sales and distribution are handled by Lights On, positioning the film within a wider network of cross-border independent cinema.