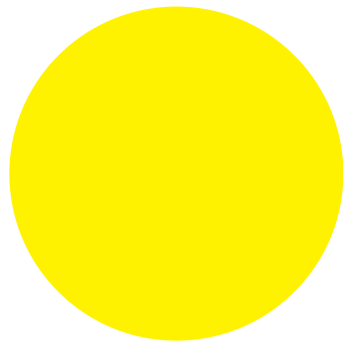


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US 'Freedom Project' in SOH; crucible for military clout and diplomatic openness

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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.

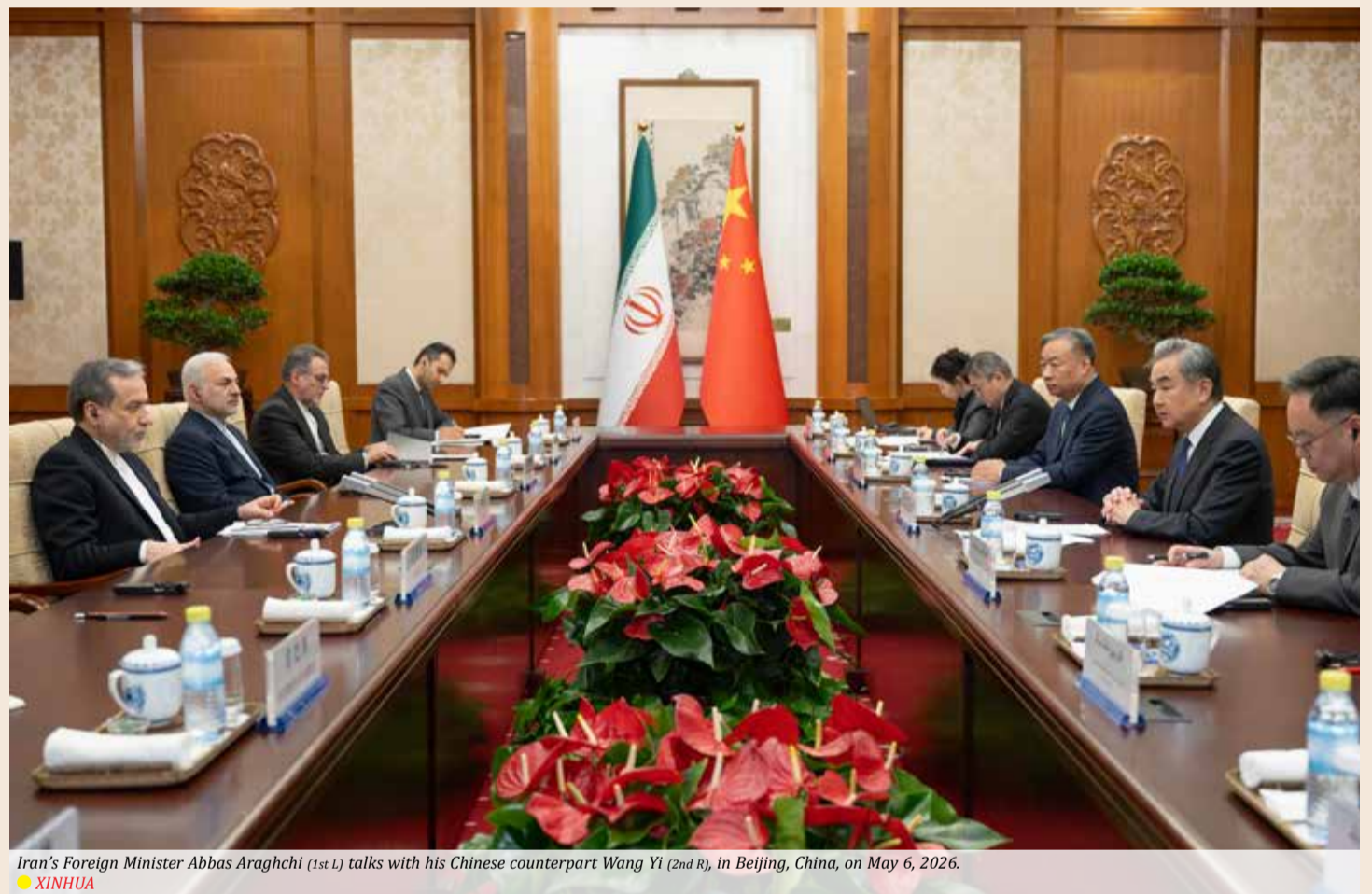
Obstacles to international participation

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 >](#)

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Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (1st L) talks with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi (2nd R), in Beijing, China, on May 6, 2026. XINHUA



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