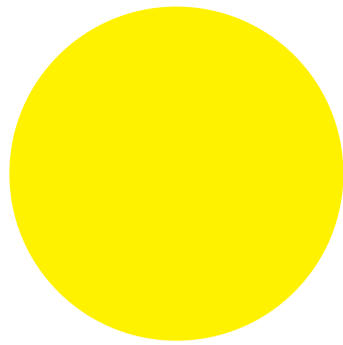


Azmoun omitted as Iran names provisional World Cup squad



6 >



irandaily.ir

newspaper.irandaily.ir

IranDailyWeb

Armed Forces warn US of harsher response to possible onslaught

2 >



What is Iran's legal approach on closure of Strait of Hormuz?

4 >



Kerman eyes UNESCO status for historic core

7 >



Iran seeks digital reboot to recount tourism for global audience

8 >

President hopeful Pakistan's efforts will bring lasting regional peace

US presence only stokes insecurity, instability: *Qalibaf*

2 >



President Masoud Pezeshkian (c) meets with Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi (3rd L) in Tehran, Iran on May 17, 2026. president.ir

Geopolitical implications of Trump's visit to China for Iran & regional order



By Hamed Vafaei
Professor of China Studies

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The official visit of Donald Trump to Beijing from May 13 to 15, marked the first trip by a sitting US president to China since 2017. It unfolded against a backdrop of global tensions—most notably the war and military aggression by the United States and Israel against Iran in February, severe disruptions to navigation in the Strait of Hormuz, and a global energy crisis—and, as such, drew widespread international attention. From a geopolitical standpoint, the visit can be seen as an attempt by two major global powers to manage their strategic rivalry under conditions where, at least in Beijing's view, the "Thucydides Trap" continues to threaten their relations. Yet, as evidence suggests, economic and security imperatives have pushed both sides toward carving out a framework of "stability within constructive competition."

A defining paradigm shift for Iran

The first notable aspect of the visit was its postponement due to the joint US-Israeli aggression against Iran, Tehran's retaliatory responses, and the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz—developments that underscore the rising

weight of West Asia in Washington-Beijing calculations. A significant paradigm shift has occurred here, one that directly relates to Iran's national interests. While US national security documents and earlier projections suggested that South and East Asia would dominate the agendas of Xi Jinping and Trump, a substantial portion of non-bilateral discussions instead focused on West Asia and its evolving dynamics.

In this context, China—as the largest buyer of Iranian oil, absorbing more than 80% of Tehran's exports, and increasingly dependent on stability in the Persian Gulf for its energy security—finds itself needing to coordinate positions with a power that is simultaneously the region's aggressor and a foremost security threat to China itself.

In response to what many countries, including China, have described as a clear violation of Iran's sovereignty, the UN Charter, and international law, the Islamic Republic of Iran launched defensive operations, including imposing restrictions on transit through the Strait of Hormuz. Tehran emphasized that the waterway remained open to commercial vessels not linked to the aggressors, while identifying the US military presence and blockade as the primary obstacle to the free flow of energy. This stance created a "geopolitical lever" for Iran in countering unlawful aggression—an issue that made its way into Trump's consultations in Beijing and was explicitly referenced in his remarks at Zhongnanhai.

Among the key developments tied to West Asia and the Strait of Hormuz during Trump's visit were preliminary agreements to expand access for US companies and deepen mutual investments with China. In parallel, Beijing signaled interest in purchasing more energy from diversified sources, including the United States, in a bid to balance the weight of actors in this sector and take practical steps toward reducing its dependence on Middle Eastern energy. Although Xi Jinping underscored Taiwan as the foremost issue in US-China relations during talks with Trump, it is difficult to ignore the reality that the Hormuz crisis—on which China had previously put forward proposals and which remains a core concern for Washington—featured prominently in recent exchanges between the two sides.

From a geopolitical perspective, the US-Israeli aggression against Iran has turned the Strait of Hormuz into a central arena of regional and global confrontation. The resulting disruptions to navigation have driven up energy prices and piled pressure on all parties. China, having invested billions in the Belt and Road Initiative, cannot afford a prolonged crisis. Accordingly, while continuing to import energy from Iran, Beijing has simultaneously sought to pursue a form of mediation that might be described as "controlled risk-taking." At the same time, reports suggesting the possibility of US-China trade-offs over Iran in exchange for concessions on Taiwan or in the technology sphere—po-

tentially turning Tehran into a "bargaining chip among great powers"—appear to have caught the attention of Iranian policymakers. This is reflected in diplomatic moves that encouraged Abbas Araghchi, as the Islamic Republic's top diplomat, to meet his counterpart Wang Yi ahead of Trump's visit, followed by travel to New Delhi for talks with Indian and Russian officials—an effort aimed at shaping a multilateral diplomatic response to neutralize such risks.

Another key point is that the visit, taking place amid the Hormuz and West Asia crisis, can be interpreted as an attempt by Beijing and Washington to recalibrate the balance of power in the Persian Gulf in favor of energy exporters. At the same time, by creating opportunities for regional states to extract concessions from US-China competition, it may open space for "regional multipolarity." In such a setting, strengthening and expanding ties with BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and neighboring countries appears increasingly essential for Iran.

Need for strategic realism in Tehran

While it may take time for the full dimensions of Trump's visit to China to become clear, the trip already stands as an example of "managing competition in an emerging multipolar order." Alongside the opportunities it presents for Tehran to play its hand more astutely, it carries a fundamental warning: transforming the Strait of Hormuz into

a globally influential lever could render Iran's dependence on Beijing more precarious than before.

In this context, Iran's diplomatic system, while maintaining its defensive and legal principles vis-à-vis the aggressors, must capitalize on the unique assets at its disposal—including the resilience and cohesion demonstrated on the ground—by putting forward a comprehensive, strategic, and multilateral package. Through targeted, precise, and strategic negotiations, Tehran can both secure its future energy interactions with powers such as China and deepen its participation in Beijing's global initiatives, while making full use of the current window of opportunity to pursue a dignified and calculated engagement with China.

It should not be forgotten that although Iran-China relations are deeply rooted, in today's geopolitical landscape, durable interests are increasingly defined by production and value chains. With a clear-eyed understanding of evolving Beijing-Washington dynamics—traces of which can be discerned between the lines of Xi-Trump negotiations—Tehran has the potential to consolidate its position as an influential regional actor rather than a mere pawn in great-power bargaining. Trump's visit to Beijing and his meeting with Xi Jinping serve as a reminder that smart, targeted, and long-term diplomacy—when coupled with tangible levers such as the Strait of Hormuz—can function as a key to survival in the Asian century.

President hopeful Pakistan's efforts will bring lasting regional peace

US presence only stokes insecurity, instability: **Qalibaf**

International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian on Sunday expressed hope that Pakistan's mediation efforts between Tehran and Washington would lead to the reinforcement of lasting peace, stability, and security in the region.

Pezeshkian made the remarks in a meeting with visiting Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi who arrived in Tehran on Saturday for talks with Iranian officials amid diplomatic efforts to put an end to the ongoing regional tensions triggered by a recent war of aggression by the United States and Israel against Iran.

The Iranian president described the military campaign against Iran as a great crime contrary to all humanitarian, legal, and international principles, saying that the main goal of the aggression was to create internal instability and attempt to weaken and overthrow the Islamic Establishment in Iran.

However, he said, they never imag-

ined that the "great and noble" nation of Iran would stand by their country with such unity.

The Iranian president also called on the Islamic countries to strengthen their unity to reduce the possibility of intervention and aggression by trans-regional powers and the Israeli regime in the region.

Earlier on the day, the Pakistani official also held a separate meeting with Iran's top parliamentarian Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf.

Some regional governments claim that the US presence in the region would guarantee their security and stability. However, recent developments have shown that this presence not only does not bring security for them but it will create insecurity in the region, Qalibaf said.

New proposals exchanged

The meeting came as there were reports of exchange of new proposals between Iran and the United States for resumption of peace

talks during the visit by the Pakistani official.

Fars News Agency reported on Sunday that Tehran and Washington have exchanged new proposals through the mediator Pakistan for resumption of peace talks stalled over several key issues.

The news agency said that Washington had presented a five-point list which included a demand for Iran to keep only one nuclear site in operation and transfer its stockpile of highly enriched uranium to the United States.

The US also refused to release "even 25 percent" of Iran's frozen assets abroad or pay any reparations for the damage inflicted on Iran during the aggression which broke out on February 28 against Iran, according to Fars.

The report added that the US had conditioned the cessation of hostilities on all fronts on the start of negotiations.

In its proposal, Iran has called for an end of the war on all fronts including Israel's campaign in Leba-

non, as well as a halt to the US naval blockade on Iranian ports in place since April 13.

It also called for lifting all the sanctions and the release of Iranian assets frozen abroad under long-standing US sanctions.

Fars said the Iranian proposal had emphasized that Tehran would continue to manage the strategic Strait of Hormuz, a vital energy conduit which it has largely kept closed since the start of the US-Israeli aggression against Iran. Iranian media reported that Tehran conveyed its views to the Pakistan after receiving a set of proposals from the American side.

The latest developments surrounding the negotiations between Iran and the US came as efforts are underway to end the ongoing tensions in the region, which have been caused by the weeks-long US-Israeli aggression against Iran.

On April 11-12, Iran and the US held the first round of negotiations brokered by Pakistan, days after Islamabad mediated a cease-



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian (R) shakes hands with Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi during a meeting in Tehran on May 17, 2026.

president.ir

fire to halt the aggression on Iran. However, it failed to produce an agreement due to the US excessive demands.

Efforts to bring back the sides to the negotiating table also failed after Iran refused to take part in the

second round due to the US violation of the ceasefire.

However, the two countries have been exchanging proposals through mediator Pakistan to find a way out of the crisis which has also disrupted global economy.

Armed Forces warn US of harsher response to possible onslaught

International Desk

A senior spokesman for Iran's Armed Forces warned the United States on Sunday that any renewed aggression against Iran will be met with "more crushing and severe response" than the previous one.

Brigadier General Abolfazl Shekarchi made the remarks in response to recent threats by the US President Donald Trump against Iran if no agreement is reached between the two countries.

Shekarchi said on Sunday that repeated threats by "delusional" US president against Iran would only deepen Washington's troubles.

"Repeating any foolishness to compensate for America's disgrace in the third imposed war against Iran will bring no consequence other than receiving more crushing and severe blows for that country," Shekarchi said.

He added that the "desperate" US president should know that if the US launches new aggression against Iran, US army will face "unprecedented, offensive, surprising and tumultuous scenarios," and will sink into a "self-created quagmire" caused by Washington's adventurous policies.

Trump has escalated his war rhetoric against Iran in recent days, threatening renewed strikes against



Abolfazl Shekarchi
IRNA

the country if diplomatic efforts do not reach an agreement.

Iran's Armed Forces gave a strong response to a recent aggression by the US and Israel against Iran by launching missile and drone attacks on the US military bases in the regional countries and the Israel's positions in the occupied territories. The unprovoked US-Israeli war on Iran began on February 28 with air raids that assassinated senior Iranian officials and commanders and targeted civilian infrastructure, residential areas, educational institutes, and historical and cultural sites.

More than 3,700 people were killed in the attacks on Iran.

FM spox: US at it again to justify war with 'grand lie'

Meanwhile, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baqaei said the US and the Israeli regime are fabricating a new "grand lie" to justify their illegal "war of choice" against the Islamic Republic, specif-

ically as they claim their actions aim to restore stability in global energy markets.

In a post on his X account on Sunday, Baqaei said the reckless warmongering of the US and Israel is the root cause of shattered promising diplomatic processes.

Through an unprovoked military aggression against Iran, he added, Washington and the Tel Aviv regime deliberately injected insecurity into vital energy routes and are now accusing Tehran of destabilization, to put into practice Goebbels' infamous dictum: "Accuse others of what you yourself are doing."

"This is their familiar, cynical playbook: manufacture crisis and war; then escalate further under the noble banner of 'restoring stability' and 'defending peace,'" the Iranian spokesperson emphasized.

The spokesman's post came amid heightened tensions in the Strait of Hormuz, a critical maritime corridor through which a significant share of the world's energy trade passes.

Iran shut down the Strait of Hormuz to the aggressors and their allies in response to the aggression. Iranian authorities began enforcing much stricter controls following US President Donald Trump's announcement of a blockade targeting Iranian vessels and ports last month.

Speaker named Iran's special envoy for China's affairs



Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf
IRNA

International Desk

Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf was appointed as the country's special representative for China's affairs.

According to sources cited by Tasnim news agency, Qalibaf assumed the responsibility on Sunday following a proposal by President Masoud Pezeshkian and subsequent approval by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei.

"Given the nature of Qalibaf's appointment, this responsibility differs in terms of the level of authority from previous representatives," the sources said.

They explained that Iran's current Ambassador to Beijing, Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli, had previously served as the

president's representative for China affairs, while the late Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Ali Larijani, had acted as "the Leader's special representative for China affairs."

"However, Mr. Qalibaf has assumed this responsibility as Iran's special representative following the president's proposal and the Leader's approval," the sources added.

Earlier this month, Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi paid a visit to China for high-level meetings, amid a shaky ceasefire between Iran and the United States that has largely lost its original purpose due to US interference with international commercial shipping.

Araghchi exchanged views with his Chinese counterpart on key issues, including the recent imposed war against Iran, the situation in the Strait of Hormuz, developments in West Asia, the expansion of trade relations, and the broadening of international cooperation.

Rahmani Fazli, who currently serves as Iran's ambassador to China, said recently that Beijing plays a key role in Tehran's political balancing strategy and has worked to reduce tensions in West Asia following the US-Israeli aggression against Iran.

Iran condemns Israel's assassination of senior Hamas commander



Izz El-Din Al-Haddad

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry in a statement on Saturday condemned Israel assassination of a senior Hamas commander, describing it as yet another

desperate attempt by the regime to crush the unstoppable spirit of Palestinian resistance.

The statement came after the Israeli regime assassinated general commander of al-Qassam Brigades Izz El-Din Al-Haddad, his wife and child on Friday night.

Iran's Foreign Ministry extended deepest condolences to the Hamas leadership, the people of Palestine, and to all Muslims and freedom-seekers around the globe.

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly condemns the terrorist act by the savage Zionist regime in assassinating Izz al-Din Haddad, Commander-in-Chief of the Qassam Brigades, along with his wife and child," the statement said.

The Foreign Ministry made it crystal clear that this criminal act, like all previous assassinations, is an integral part of the Israeli regime's broader colonial scheme aimed at the total erasure of Palestine.

The statement also denounced the United States, the Israeli regime's biggest military, financial, and political sponsor, stating that Washington bears full complicity in every single one of these heinous crimes.

Earlier in the day, the Al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas, had officially confirmed the commander's assassination in the "cowardly" Israeli airstrike on Gaza City the previous night.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Pezeshkian urges stricter energy controls in postwar strains



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian chairs a meeting on strengthening the resilience of Iran's fuel supply network in Tehran on May 17, 2026.
● president.ir

Economy Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian called for swift measures to curb energy con-

sumption, saying the country must make consumption management a national priority to strengthen resilience and navigate wartime conditions and

mounting foreign pressure. "If we want to strengthen the country's resilience and safely get through wartime conditions and external pressure, we must

put consumption management and control on the national agenda from today," Pezeshkian said during a meeting on strengthening the resilience of Iran's fuel supply network, according to president.ir.

Pezeshkian also pointed to government efforts to maintain economic stability and safeguard livelihoods under current conditions.

"The government has deployed all available capacities and resources to manage the situation and support people's livelihoods," he said, adding that authorities were monitoring the supply of essential goods and services through economic diplomacy, regular coordination with neighboring countries, and ongoing meetings with trade groups, producers,

distributors and other economic sectors.

The meeting, focused on fuel consumption management and improving the resilience of the country's fuel supply network under wartime conditions, was attended by the oil minister, the head of the Planning and Budget Organization (PBO), the Central Bank governor, the head of the Energy Optimization and Strategic Management Organization and other officials.

Officials reviewed gasoline consumption trends, strategic fuel reserves, energy supply and distribution, possible energy-sector scenarios and measures aimed at improving the stability of the fuel supply network under current conditions. Iran is facing growing external economic and maritime pressure, including US restrictions targeting its shipping and oil trade through a naval blockade imposed since mid-April. The move, part of what Washington has described as "Operation Economic Fury," is aimed at

pressuring Tehran into a peace agreement following a 40-day aggression that began in late February.

Pezeshkian later outlined the government's non-price measures to reduce gasoline consumption.

"The government has put forward a package of executive and cultural measures to control fuel consumption, including revising fuel quotas, reducing allocations for high-consumption and high-income groups, tightening oversight of the distribution chain and combating fuel smuggling, expanding incentives for public transportation use, reducing unnecessary private car travel, and promoting changes in consumption patterns through cultural and media campaigns," he said.

"Under current conditions, gasoline supply and imports are facing constraints, but if the public cooperates in managing consumption, the situation can be handled without serious disruption."

Steel industry eyes holding 10th global rank despite war losses

Economy Desk

Iran's steel sector is expected to maintain its position as the world's 10th-largest producer despite losing about 30% of capacity in recent US-Israeli attacks, Vahid Yaqoubi, secretary of the country's Steel Association, said in a report on the industry's postwar outlook. Yaqoubi, speaking in remarks reported by Tasnim news agency, said Iran has held the 10th position in global steel production in recent years, maintaining that rank in both output and exports, though damages from the recent conflict have created challenges for the sector.

"Estimates indicate that about 30% of the country's steel capacity has been lost during these attacks and some major steel units have been damaged," Yaqoubi said. "However, reconstruction efforts have begun and given Iran's roughly 10m-ton gap with Vietnam, the 11th-largest producer globally, maintaining the

country's global position remains possible."

GDP share to hold despite output drop

The steel industry accounted for about 5.5% of Iran's gross domestic product (GDP) before the war, and that share is expected to be maintained despite a projected production decline this year, he said.

Yaqoubi also highlighted the sector's role in employment.

"The steel industry has created about 2 million direct and indirect jobs, accounting for nearly 8% of the country's employment," he said. "Only in the two complexes of Mobarakeh Steel and Khuzestan Steel, which sustained the heaviest damage, about 40,000 people are employed."

The two complexes — Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC) in central Isfahan Province and Khuzestan Steel Company in southwestern Khuzestan Province — were struck multiple times during the US-Israeli conflict that be-

gan on February 28. He emphasized the need to support damaged facilities. "These companies have not conducted layoffs so far, but continuing operations and preserving employment requires serious support, as a decline in revenues over the long term could reduce these enterprises' resilience," Yaqoubi said.

Forex share seen falling just 2 points

The steel industry previously generated about 11% of Iran's foreign currency revenues, equivalent to approximately \$8 billion, but that share is expected to fall by two percentage points this year to around 9%, he said. On the domestic market, he said assessments by the steel association showed shortages of steel products would not be as widespread as some estimates had suggested.

"We expect a shortage of around one million tons of steel products and about 200,000 tons of hot-rolled coil by mid-September,



which can be offset through market management and imports," he said.

Yaqoubi suggested steel-consuming industries rely on imports during the first six months of the Iranian year, which began on March 21, to allow enough time for reconstruction work to be completed. He also said a surplus had emerged in the sponge iron sector.

"With damage to some facilities, around 15 million tons of sponge iron capacity has been lost, but there is still a surplus of about 12 million

tons in this segment, which requires a review of export policies and easier mineral exports," he said.

Yaqoubi added that imports of some steel products should be managed to prevent shortages of raw materials for downstream industries, particularly in products such as cold-rolled and galvanized sheets.

He expressed hope that improving conditions and faster reconstruction efforts would allow the steel industry to return to normal operations quickly and restore production and exports.

Minster proposes UN funding for war-damaged housing, infrastructure

Economy Desk

Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadeq Malvajerd proposed that the UN-founded World Urban Forum (WUF) establish a support fund for countries affected by crises, aimed at helping rebuild housing units and infrastructure damaged in war-affected states.

According to ISNA, during the recent war between the United States and Israel against Iran, about 150,000 housing units were destroyed, leaving residents homeless.

The minister said that infrastructure, including several bridges as well as road and rail networks considered key pillars of safe and resilient urban living, was also severely damaged in the attacks.

A government spokesperson said the 40-day US-Israeli war caused an estimated \$270 billion in damage to Iran. A parliamentary economic committee estimated that \$28.5 billion of that figure related to non-civilian sectors.

In Tehran, 44,750 housing units were damaged, while 99,878 residential and non-residential units in other cities were also affected, as reported by ISNA.

So far, repairs to 37,000 lightly damaged housing units have been completed. The government is providing temporary housing assistance to those whose homes were destroyed, offering between about \$1,667 to \$3,889 (300 million and 700 million tomans) in smaller cities and about \$11,111 (2 billion tomans) in Tehran. However, funding for the reconstruction of completely destroyed homes has not yet been approved.

In a message to the 13th World Urban Forum (WUF-13) in Baku, Azerbaijan, Sadeq Malvajerd emphasized the need for international support to rebuild damaged cities and strengthen implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

Her remarks were read on Sunday at the ministerial session of WUF-13 by Gholamreza Kazemian, deputy minister for urban planning and architecture at the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development.

"While we speak about safe and resilient cities, in some parts of the world children are still facing the sound of missiles and bombardment, and many homes have been destroyed as a result of war," Sadeq Malvajerd said in the message.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran, with thousands of years of urban history, has been exposed to war twice over the past year, raising serious questions about the feasibility of planning for sustainable urban development under such conditions," she added.

Iran was subjected to a 12-day Israeli attack in June and later a 40-day joint US-Israeli offensive at the end of February.

Exports to neighbors continue amid shipping disruptions: Chamber

Economy Desk

Exports to neighboring countries including Iraq, Afghanistan, Turkey, Russia and Central Asia are continuing intensely, though goods previously routed through the UAE remain stalled, a senior Iranian trade official said. Hamid Hosseini, a member of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, told ISNA that while trade with immediate neighbors was proceeding, goods previously shipped to Jebel Ali under UAE documentation continued to face unresolved challenges.

"We are negotiating with Iraq and Pakistan to transfer our imported goods through these routes and carry out our exports, but we are still facing problems," Hosseini said.

He said most importers who had unloaded containers in Pakistan and India due to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz were now working to resolve their logistical issues, adding that few were currently seeking to import new goods. Since May 13 and after a 40-day illegal war of aggression, the US has imposed a so-called naval blockade on Iranian ports on the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of global oil supply passes, disrupting shipping routes and energy trade.

Hosseini noted that shipments of essential goods, medicine and other basic needs had not been disrupted, with food and other products continuing to enter the country and likely exiting as well. Touching on crude oil and refined products, he said, "US forces were present at

the entrance to the Indian Ocean, and based on satellite tracking and vessel monitoring, ships with a history of oil tanker operations or cooperation with Iran were being allowed to depart but not to enter Iranian waters."

Hosseini emphasized that even if vessels could reach Iranian ports to load cargo, they could currently only be used as floating storage. "Just as many countries in the region were forced to cut their oil production, reports indicate that our production has decreased by about 11%, and we may have to reduce it further in the future if storage tanks fill up and ships fail to arrive," he said.

Washington continues to intensify sanctions and blockade enforcement targeting Iran's oil sector, with US officials re-

peatedly stating that measures aimed at shipping networks, intermediaries and tankers are designed to curb Tehran's crude exports and restrict revenue flows.

However, TankerTrackers has said Iran still has access to numerous oil tankers capable of loading and transporting its crude shipments, suggesting Tehran retains logistical flexibility despite years of Western sanctions on its energy and shipping industries.

The oil-tracking service said that Iran still has available oil storage capacity at its main export hub on Kharg Island and retains a sizeable fleet of tankers capable of transporting crude, amid renewed US claims that sanctions pressure is constraining Tehran's oil exports.

Three interpretive approaches toward Hormuz's new transit regime

What is Iran's legal approach on closure of Strait of Hormuz?



By Rasoul Safarahang

Senior researcher at the Center for Middle East Strategic Studies

By Parisa Salimi Kochi

Researcher in regional studies



OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The Strait of Hormuz, as one of the world's most vital waterways through which approximately one-fifth of global crude oil passes, constitutes not only a geostrategic point but also an arena for profound legal disputes within the international law of the sea. This strait, with its narrowest width measuring approximately 21 nautical miles and the overlapping territorial seas of Iran and Oman, is a clear exemplar of a "strait used for international navigation". The criteria for this definition derive from the judgment of the International Court of Justice in the Corfu Channel Case (ICJ, 1949), which emphasizes the connection between two parts of the high seas and actual use for navigation.

The issue, however, becomes more complex insofar as Iran signed the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in December 1982 but has not yet ratified it in its Parliament. The United States has also remained outside this treaty and occupies a position similar to that of Iran.

Hence, proponents of a broad interpretation of the obligations of signatories to this Convention invoke Article 18 of the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (VCLT), which creates a provisional obligation not to defeat the object and purpose of the treaty. In contrast, critics rely upon the sovereignty of the coastal State, the persistent objector rule, and the primacy of the law of naval warfare during an armed conflict. In this article, we focus on three approaches. The first approach concentrates on obligations arising from signature. The second approach challenges that position. The third approach, complementing the first two, presents a distinct argument that follows Iran's interpretation of this situation.

First approach; signature obligations

Proponents of this approach maintain that Iran's signature of UNCLOS, even without ratification, creates serious obligations that render the imposition of extensive restrictions on navigation through the Strait of Hormuz difficult. The principal pillar of this argument is Article 18 of the 1969 VCLT, which obligates States to refrain from acts that would defeat the object and purpose of the treaty, as long as they have not declared their intention not to become parties. Under this view, the object and purpose of UNCLOS are to guarantee safe and unimpeded freedom of navigation in the world's vital waterways. Part III of the Convention, in particular Article 38, provides for the transit passage regime: a continuous, expeditious, uninterrupted, and non-suspendable passage for all ships and aircraft,



● PRESS TV

including military vessels and aircraft. Any closure or severe restriction, especially with respect to neutral merchant vessels, violates this object and purpose.

Prominent jurists, such as James Kraska, emphasize that the transit passage regime has crystallized as a rule of customary international law, and widespread State practice, including the United States' Freedom of Navigation Operations, confirms it. The Corfu Channel Case (UK v. Albania) laid the foundation for "innocent passage"; however, UNCLOS elevated that standard to the level of transit passage. Even non-party States, such as Iran, because of their signature, cannot fundamentally undermine this regime. Moreover, the customary parts of UNCLOS, for example, the 12-nautical-mile breadth of the territorial sea, bind Iran. This is despite the fact that Iran's Interpretative Declaration upon signature (1982) is deemed insufficient because the Article 18 obligation remains intact. This approach, within diplomatic forums and the Security Council, strengthens the legitimacy of counter-measures and considers a complete closure of the Strait as a violation of both the signature obligation and customary rules.

Second approach; coastal state sovereignty and its limitations

Critics, however, emphasize Iran's non-party status and interpret Article 18 of the 1969 VCLT restrictively. This Article creates only a negative and provisional obligation, and merely prohibits those acts which would fundamentally "defeat" the treaty's object and purpose — not just any regulation or restriction for security purposes. The Interna-

tional Court of Justice and judicial practice have applied this Article narrowly and do not construe it as imposing full compliance with every detail of the treaty.

A key strength of this approach is the persistent objector rule. According to the 2018 ILC Draft Conclusions on Identification of Customary International Law (Conclusion 15), if a State maintains an explicit, known, and persistent objection during the formative period of a rule, that rule is not opposable to that State. Iran declared its objection to transit passage during the negotiations of the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, issued its Interpretative Declaration in 1982, characterizing UNCLOS as a "package deal" binding only upon parties to the treaty, and enacted its Act on the Marine Areas of the Islamic Republic of Iran (1993) solely based on innocent passage. These actions demonstrate a persistent objection.

Critics argue that transit passage is an innovation of UNCLOS, and there exists no universal consensus on its customary status, particularly with respect to non-party States. Iran is bound by the 1958 Geneva Convention on the Territorial Sea and the Contiguous Zone (to which it is a party), which provides for a non-suspendable regime of innocent passage through straits. Under this regime (Article 45 of UNCLOS, as a codification of customary law), the coastal State possesses a greater right to regulate for security purposes and may prevent non-innocent passage. During an armed conflict, the San Remo Manual on International Law Applicable to Armed Conflicts at Sea (1994) largely reflects customary approach. According to paragraphs 23 to 33, the belligerent coastal State controlling the strait, subject to respect for the rights of neutral States through the establishment of safe corridors, may impose restrictions on enemy vessels. Complete closure without a corridor for neutrals is unlawful; however, prevention of enemy vessels and regulation of a corridor for others are defensible. Furthermore, Article 51 of the United Nations Charter (the right of self-defense) provides an additional justification, if the action is proportional. This approach considers Iran's position lawful but disputed, and assesses a complete closure as weak, whereas it views regulation and selective measures as stronger.

Third approach; what Iran pursues

The third approach, by accepting the strengths of the first approach (the limited obligation under Article 18 of the 1969 VCLT and the importance of the customary parts of UNCLOS) and remedying its weaknesses regarding the over-generalization of the signature obligation, presents a distinct argument. This approach combines the persistent objector rule with non-party status and creates for Iran a significant legal maneuvering space. This approach may be characterized as an intelligent synthesis of the two preceding approaches, which possesses greater legal legitimacy and is more consistent with practical realities.

In peacetime, the regime of non-suspendable innocent passage applies. Iran may impose security measures, such as inspection and regulation, without disrupting overall navigation. The 1982 Declaration and the 1993 Act demonstrate an intention not to fully accept transit passage, thereby minimizing the Article 18 obligation. Article 18 of the VCLT



The third approach emphasizes that the legal ambiguity resulting from non-ratification by both parties (Iran and the United States) is interpretable in favor of Iran. Because the United States is also a non-party, opponents cannot present a strong, treaty-based argument alone. The ILC's 2018 Draft Conclusions explicitly affirm the persistent objector rule and validate Iran's continuous objection from the negotiations through its declaration and subsequent national legislation. This does not entirely render transit passage applicable against Iran.

does not create a duty to comply with every detail of transit passage; rather, it merely prevents fundamental defeat of the object and purpose. The judgment in the Corfu Channel Case likewise confirms this regime and permits the coastal State to regulate for security, provided that there is no general suspension.

The third approach emphasizes that the legal ambiguity resulting from non-ratification by both parties (Iran and the United States) is interpretable in favor of Iran. Because the United States is also a non-party, opponents cannot present a strong, treaty-based argument alone. The ILC's 2018 Draft Conclusions explicitly affirm the persistent objector rule and validate Iran's continuous objection from the negotiations through its declaration and subsequent national legislation. This does not entirely render transit passage applicable against Iran.

On the other hand, during wartime, the law of naval warfare and the 1994 San Remo Manual take precedence. Iran, as the belligerent coastal State controlling the strait, possesses the right of selective denial to enemy vessels, subject to the establishment of safe corridors for neutral States. The San Remo Manual (in particular Rules 23 to 33) strikes this balance because although transit passage rights continue in peacetime, belligerent States may undertake hostile actions in waters under their own sovereignty while respecting neutral rights. The right of self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter and the principle of proportionality reinforce Iran's measures. In this regard, the Nicaragua v. United States case highlights the distinction between treaty obligations and customary rules, demonstrating that customary rules are binding separately, albeit with exceptions.

Thus, this approach views ambiguity not as a weakness but as a tool for legal maneuvering. Complete and permanent closure for all vessels without a safe corridor is weak and may violate neutral rights; however, selective regulation, inspection, and denial of passage to enemy vessels for security threats are entirely defensible. Scholars who emphasize the "package deal" nature of UNCLOS support this position. The third approach is consistent with judicial practice (for instance, the Corfu Channel Case distinguishing wartime from peacetime) and the principle of good faith in the 1969 VCLT, and generates greater legitimacy in international forums.

In conclusion, this approach is distinct because it does not exaggerate in an idealistic manner like the first approach, nor is it merely defensive like the second approach; rather, by combining the persistent objector rule, non-party status, the 1958 Geneva Convention (to which Iran is a party), the San Remo Manual, and the right of self-defense, it provides a coherent framework that both preserves Iran's sovereign rights and observes minimal customary obligations. It appears that Iran also follows this third interpretation.



A woman walks past a giant billboard reading "The Strait of Hormuz remains closed" with an illustration depicting hostile American drones and warships trapped in a fishing net held by Iranian Navy soldiers, at Enqelab Square in Tehran, Iran, on April 12, 2026.

● ATTA KENARE/AFP

Persian Gulf states and Iran

Implications of hosting military bases under Jus ad Bellum and Jus in Bello



By Chiara Redaelli
IHL/ICL expert for IDLO,
Kyiv office



By Antonio Bultrini
Associate Professor
of International Law
at the University of
Florence

OPINION

Since late February 2026, the United States and Israel have conducted sustained strikes on Iranian territory. The chronology of these operations makes clear that the campaign has involved coordinated strikes on nuclear, military, leadership, and civilian targets. The jus ad bellum (the law governing the right to go to war) arguments advanced by Washington, principally a theory of anticipatory self-defence against Iran's nuclear program, have been strongly rejected by international legal opinion, which holds that the campaign does not satisfy the requirements of lawful (anticipatory) self-defence under Article 51. Iran has retaliated by striking Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. Iranian officials have stated publicly that any territory or airspace "utilized to support aggressors" is a legitimate target, and an Iranian letter to the United Nations Secretary General explicitly invokes the right of self-defence under Article 51 of the Charter. The Persian Gulf states, for their part, have condemned Iranian strikes and pointed to attacks on civilian infrastructure as evidence that Iran is targeting them as states, not merely as hosts for US forces. The legal significance of that distinction depends entirely on the status of military bases, how they are used, and the Persian Gulf states' involvement in the military operations. The analysis that follows proceeds through four scenarios, each entailing distinct legal consequences.

Scenario one; closing the bases

Under jus ad bellum, Iran's right to direct force against Persian Gulf state territory depends on whether any conduct attributable to those states rises to the level of an armed attack within the meaning of Article 51 of the Charter. So long as the Persian Gulf states have neither committed acts of aggression themselves nor authorized the use of their territory for offensive operations against Iran, no legal basis under the jus ad bellum exists for Iranian force to be directed at them. For the Persian Gulf states, formal neutrality is not a viable option. The UAE hosts Al Dhafra Air Base, one of the most significant US forward operating installations in the region; Qatar hosts Al Udeid, the operational hub for US Central Command; Bahrain is home to the Fifth Fleet; Saudi Arabia and Kuwait host a substantial Army and Air Force presence. Under the law of neutrality, a state hosting a belligerent's military bases cannot in practice discharge the obligations of formal neutrality since doing so would require it to close those installations and intern the foreign forces. Under formal neutrality doctrine, Iran would be obligated to respect Persian Gulf territorial integrity and could not lawfully



direct any force against Persian Gulf state territory or assets. Yet because the legal precondition, namely the effective enforcement of neutrality against the US military presence, is unrealistic in practice, any formal declaration of neutrality would be legally hollow and would not confer the immunities that neutrality promises.

Scenario two; use of the bases to support military operations

In this scenario US forces use the military bases located in Persian Gulf states to support the war efforts, but no attack is launched directly from the bases. A state which aids or assists another state in the commission of an internationally wrongful act bears international responsibility if it does so with knowledge of the circumstances of the wrongful act and if the act would be internationally wrongful if committed by the assisting state itself. Both conditions seem readily satisfied in the Persian Gulf context. Assisting in an act of aggression is clearly internationally wrongful if committed by the state itself, inasmuch as it would violate Article 2(4) of the Charter. The Persian Gulf states' awareness of the wrongfulness of the US-Israeli campaign is, at this stage, difficult to contest. The finding of complicity would legitimize Iran, as an injured State, to invoke the international responsibility of the relevant Persian Gulf states and to demand cessation of the internationally wrongful conduct and, where appropriate, assurances and guarantees of non-repetition, specifically the termination of the material support and territorial facilitation currently extended to the US-Israeli campaign. Beyond cessation, Iran may claim full reparation for injury caused by the complicit conduct. Where diplomatic avenues are exhausted or ineffective, Iran may resort to countermeasures: non-forcible measures directed at the responsible Persian Gulf state that would otherwise be contrary to Iran's international obligations towards that state, for the purpose of inducing cessation of the wrongful act.

Scenario three; use of the bases to launch attacks

We now turn to cases in which bases are used as direct platforms for launching attacks. If the United States launches attacks from those bases in Per-

sian Gulf states, Iran would have a strong argument that it may, in exercising its right of self-defence against the United States, direct force against the bases from which the armed attack is being conducted. When foreign bases on its territory provide indispensable launch, command, and support functions for an ongoing armed attack, in the sense that disabling them would materially impede the continuation of the strikes, the facilities concerned become part of the territorial infrastructure of that attack. In such circumstances, defensive force may lawfully be directed at those bases as part of self-defence against the primary attacker.

In all events, Iran's right of self-defence is constrained by the requirements of necessity and proportionality, as well as by international humanitarian law. Any defensive force directed at US bases on Persian Gulf territory must be limited to what is required to neutralize their specific territorial contribution to the armed attack and calibrated in scale and scope to that contribution rather than to the overall gravity of the aggression. Carefully targeted strikes against the military installations actually used to launch or support attacks are therefore easier to justify than attacks against other infrastructure located in Persian Gulf state territory. From a jus ad bellum perspective, if the United States launches attacks against Iran from bases located in the Persian Gulf states, the latter commit an act of aggression under Article 3(f) of General Assembly Resolution 3314, which defines Aggression. This raises a crucial jus in bello (the law governing conduct in war) question: does that act of aggression make the Persian Gulf states parties to an international armed conflict with Iran? The answer is not settled in positive law. However, even if territorial authorization engages jus ad bellum responsibility, the absence of Persian Gulf state force directed against Iran means that, on the orthodox view, the international armed conflict (IAC) threshold for party status is not yet met. A more expansive account proposes that a state becomes a co-party to an existing international armed conflict once it knowingly makes an operational contribution that is directly connected to harm to the adversary and is sufficiently integrated into the joint decision-making

processes for coordinated military operations. On the facts assumed here, the Persian Gulf states in Scenario Three occupy an analytically similar position: they may bear responsibility under the jus ad bellum for the use of their territory, but, absent their own use of force or evidence that their armed forces and command structures are integrated into US targeting and strike-planning, they have not crossed the threshold that would make them co-parties to the conflict under IHL.

Scenario four; Persian Gulf states directly contribute to the US operations

Scenario Four posits the most legally consequential configuration in which the Persian Gulf states do not merely permit US forces to operate from their territory under pre-existing treaty arrangements, but actively contribute to those operations. This encompasses a range of potential conduct, from the integration of Persian Gulf state military personnel into base command structures and intelligence-sharing arrangements, to the direct provision of targeting data, the participation of Persian Gulf armed forces in support missions, and the opening of national airspace for coordinated strike operations. Where a Persian Gulf state's own military personnel and infrastructure become operationally integrated into attack planning or execution, the conduct falls within Article 3(a) of General Assembly Resolution 3314 (Definition of Aggression), which addresses the direct use of a state's armed forces against another state. Whereas Scenario Two primarily engaged responsibility for aid or assistance, Scenario Four additionally brings into play direction and control. A Persian Gulf state that exerts operative influence over specific strike packages — by approving target sets, directing or vetting mission profiles, or integrating its command-and-control systems with those of US forces — moves beyond mere facilitation into a position of shared direction and control over the commission of the wrongful act. Where Persian Gulf state armed forces themselves participate in attacks on Iranian territory or forces, the conduct no longer falls within the category of assistance to a principal wrongdoer but constitutes the principal wrongful act. The transition from passive facil-



This video grab taken from UGC images posted on social media on February 28, 2026, and verified by AFP/TV teams in Paris, shows the moment of an Iranian retaliatory strike on a US base in Bahrain.

UGC/AFP



A state which aids or assists another state in the commission of an internationally wrongful act bears international responsibility if it does so with knowledge of the circumstances of the wrongful act and if the act would be internationally wrongful if committed by the assisting state itself. Both conditions seem readily satisfied in the Persian Gulf context.

itation to active participation has equally decisive consequences under the jus in bello. The relevant inquiry is whether a State's contribution to another belligerent's operations remains at the level of "mere" support or whether it amounts to actions related to the conduct of hostilities that have a direct impact on the enemy's ability to carry out military operations and are integrated into the collective conduct of hostilities. Support that is operationally integrated into the campaign — such as the forward transport of troops, the provision of intelligence used immediately in attacks, or the involvement of State-attributed personnel in planning and coordinating military operations — will be treated as part of the collective conduct of hostilities and may render the supporting State a party. The legal consequences of belligerent status are substantial. Persian Gulf state territory and military assets become lawful targets under international humanitarian law (IHL) for the duration of active hostilities, as long as they qualify as military objectives; Persian Gulf state military personnel captured by Iranian forces acquire prisoner-of-war status under the Third Geneva Convention; and the Persian Gulf states bear direct IHL obligations.

Conclusions

The four scenarios traced in this article show that the legal position of the Persian Gulf states vis-à-vis the US-Israeli campaign against Iran cannot be captured by a single label such as "neutrality", "non-belligerency", or "co-belligerency". Instead, different layers of jus ad bellum and jus in bello responsibility are activated as one moves from passive basing arrangements to operational integration in the conduct of hostilities. Once Persian Gulf state forces or other attributable personnel are operationally integrated into the strike architecture — through shared targeting, combined planning, or participation in offensive missions — the applicable framework shifts from complicity to co-authorship of aggression. Under IHL, the same operational integration would mark the transition from non-belligerent support to full party status in the armed conflict.

For Iran, properly characterizing the Persian Gulf states' conduct matters for calibrating its responses: derivative complicity in aggression may justify robust non-forcible countermeasures and claims for reparation, but not force; use of bases as a launch point for attacks would authorize self-defence action directed at the bases; direct participation in attacks can, in principle, ground full self-defence action. For the Persian Gulf states, the central message is cautionary. Hosting foreign bases in itself does not make them belligerents, but allowing those installations and national command structures to become embedded in unlawful strike operations risks transforming them from passive facilitators into co-aggressors and possibly even co-parties to the conflict.

The article first appeared on *Opinio Juris*.

Azmoun omitted as Iran names provisional World Cup squad



Iranian national team players are in action during an intra-squad game in Tehran, Iran, on May 6, 2026.
● MAHDI ZARE/FFIRI

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Amir Qalenoee has named a provisional 30-man list for the upcoming FIFA World Cup, which will be co-hosted by the United States, Mexico, and Canada from June 11.

The Iranian squad will head to Antalya, Turkey, in the coming days for its final training camp ahead of what is set to be the most politically charged campaign in the history of Iranian sport, amid the country's military conflict with the United States and Israel.

Iran will kick off its Group G campaign against New Zealand at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California, on June 15, before facing European heavyweight Belgium at the same venue six days later. The team will then travel to Seattle, Washington, to face Egypt in its final group game at Lumen Field on June 26.

Sardar Azmoun is the most high-profile absentee, as the Shabab Al Ahli striker is set to miss out on a third successive World Cup. Iran's joint-second all-time top scorer with 57 goals in 91 appearances, Azmoun missed the best part of the UAE Pro League season due to two major injury setbacks and has managed only three starts – finding the net twice – since returning to action in late February.

His omission, however, is believed to be driven by off-field issues, following his controversial social media post regarding the war in the early stages of the conflict, which began with U.S.-Israeli airstrikes on Tehran on February 28.

Qalenoee insisted that "nothing other than technical criteria" played a part in his team selection.

"Selecting the squad for the final pre-World Cup training camp was one of the toughest decisions of my coaching career. Over the past 48 hours, I had to choose only 30 players, despite the technical merit of all those who have been part of the national team matrix over the past two years and have worked for Iran's success," Qalenoee said.

"I chose the 30 players based solely on my technical standards. I just hope that those who did not get the chance to be part of the World Cup roster will still have the opportunity to wear the national team jersey in future events," added the Iranian coach, who is eager to lead Team Melli to its first-ever knockout spot at the World Cup at the seventh attempt.

Allahyar Sayyadmanesh is also a surprise absentee, after the 24-year-old winger enjoyed an impressive season with KVC Westerlo in the Belgian top flight, bagging seven goals and five assists in 29 outings. Tractor full-back Danial Esmaeilifar and his club teammate Mahdi Hashemnejad, as well as Dynamo Makhachkala midfielder Mohammad-Javad Hosseinejad, were also unlucky to be overlooked by Qalenoee despite successful campaigns with their respective clubs.

Dennis Eckert Dargahi, who received his first international call-up in March, has been named in the list. The former German under-19 international contributed seven goals in 35 appearances across domestic competitions for Belgian top-tier club Standard Liège this season.

FIFA support

Meanwhile, a FIFA delegation led by Secretary General Mattias Grafström met with Iranian Football Federation (FFIRI) officials in Istanbul on Saturday to offer reassurance and support regarding Team Melli's World Cup participation.

"FIFA President Gianni Infantino has stressed that Iran will be eagerly welcomed in North America during what promises to be the most inclusive sporting event in history. Speaking to FFIRI chairman Mahdi Taj and his colleagues at the Turkish Football Federation (TFF) headquarters, Grafström reiterated FIFA's position and outlined organizers' plans to make Iran's World Cup experience as seamless, productive and enjoyable as possible," the governing body's official website wrote of Saturday's meeting.

"We've had an excellent meeting – a constructive meeting together with the Iran FA. We're working closely together and looking very much forward to welcoming them to the FIFA World Cup 2026," Grafström said. "We had the opportunity to discuss some of the operational matters, like we do with every member association. I'm very happy that we were able to have this positive exchange, and both the Iran FA and FIFA are very happy with the meeting and looking forward to welcoming Team Melli in the USA, Canada and Mexico."

Taj, meanwhile, said, "We had a positive and constructive meeting with FIFA. We discussed our concerns and expressed our joint commitment to ensure the smooth participation of Team Melli at the World

Cup."

This was the latest twist in the months-long saga of Team Melli's World Cup campaign.

Taj, a former member of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and his two colleagues abruptly left Toronto, abandoning their onward trip to Vancouver for the 76th FIFA Congress in early May, following a clash with Canadian border officials. 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 Canada listed as a "terrorist group" in 2024 – and "offensive insults directed at the country's proud armed forces."

Despite Grafström's latest remarks, concerns remain that Iranian players who completed their military service in the IRGC could experience U.S. visa complications. U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said earlier in the month that the Team Melli squad would be welcome at the tournament but indicated that some federation members with "ties to the IRGC" may experience difficulties.

The following is the Iranian provisional squad for the World Cup:

Goalkeepers: Alireza Beiranvand (Tractor), Payam Niazmand (Persepolis), Seyyed Hossein Hosseini (Sepahan), Mohammad Khalifeh (Iranco)

Defenders: Shoja Khalilzadeh (Tractor), Ali Ne'mati (Foolad Khuzestan), Hossein Kan'anizadegan (Persepolis), Danial Eiri (Malavan FC), Ramin Rezaeian (Foolad Khuzestan), Saleh Hardani (Esteghlal), Milad Mohammadi (Persepolis), Ehsan Hajzafi (Sepahan)

Midfielders: Saeid Ezzatollahi (Shabab Al Ahli), Rouzbeh Cheshmi (Esteghlal), Mohammad Qorbani (Al Wahda), Amirmohammad Razaqinia (Esteghlal), Omid Nourafkan (Sepahan), Saman Qoddous (Kalba FC), Hadi Habibinejad (Chadormalou), Alireza Jahanbakhsh (Dender EH), Mohammad Mohebbi (Rostov), Aria Yousefi (Sepahan), Mahdi Qayedi (Al Nasr), Mahdi Torabi (Tractor), Amirhossein Mahmoudi (Persepolis)

Strikers: Mahdi Taremi (Olympiacos), Amirhossein Hosseinzadeh (Tractor), Dennis Eckert Dargahi (Standard Liège), Ali Alipour (Persepolis), Kasra Taheri (Paykan).

The list will be trimmed to 26 for the World Cup.

Iran to play Brazil in friendly double-header before VNL

Sports Desk

The Iranian men's national volleyball team will face Brazil in a friendly double-header ahead of the upcoming Volleyball Nations League (VNL), the Iranian Volleyball Federation has announced.

The two games – scheduled for June 2 and 4 – will be part of Iran's week-long preparation at the Brazilian national team's training camp in Socorro. The arrangement has been facilitated by the International Volleyball Federation (FIVB) and the Brazilian governing body of the sport, amid the Iranian team's urgent circumstances due to military tensions in the Middle East. Iran will get its VNL campaign underway against the South American powerhouse in Brasilia on June 10. The two sides also met on the opening day of last

year's annual event in the Brazilian capital, with the hosts emerging victorious in straight sets.

Tricky tests will come thick and fast in Week 1 of the preliminaries for Italian head coach Roberto Piazza's men. They will take on Bulgaria – finalists at last September's World Championships – on June 11, before facing Argentina and Belgium later in the week at the Nilson Nelson Gymnasium. Iran will then travel to Orléans, France, for the second week of action, starting with a mammoth task against the hosts and reigning Olympic champions 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 Iran 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).

The top eight teams in the 18-team standings will progress to the VNL Finals, which will begin in Ningbo Beilun, China, on July 29. China is already guaranteed a place in the quarterfinals as the host nation.

Iran will aim to build on a promising first year under Piazza by securing its first quarterfinal berth in four years at the prestigious tournament. After finishing in the bottom three in the two previous editions, Iran staged a late surge in the 2025 preliminaries to place eighth with six wins from 12 matches. However, Piazza's team ultimately missed out on the finals, as China's host status secured the Asian team a quarterfinal spot despite finishing second from bottom.



● FIVB

Asian Weightlifting Championships: Nasiri bounces back to win C&J gold in heavyweight class

Sports Desk

Iranian weightlifter Alireza Nasiri recovered from a disappointing start to his men's 110kg campaign at the Asian Weightlifting Championships to grab the clean & jerk gold in Gandhinagar, India, on Sunday.

The 20-year-old Iranian had three failed attempts (187kg, 188kg, 189kg) and missed out on the snatch podium, with China's Liu Huanhua – a 102kg gold medalist at the Paris 2024 Olympics – claiming top prize in the category thanks to a 190kg lift. Chinese Taipei's Chen Po-jei (189kg) and Turkmenistan's Davranbek Hasanbayev (188kg) finished in the following spots.

Nasiri, however, delivered

a much-improved performance in the clean & jerk, starting with a 221kg lift before registering 231kg with his second effort. That was enough for the Iranian prodigy to beat the high-profile Chinese lifter to gold by one kilogram, despite missing his third attempt of 240kg. Chinese Taipei's Dong Bingcheng took the clean & jerk bronze with 215kg.

Liu Huanhua also secured the total gold with a 420kg mark, while Hasanbayev (392kg) and Dong (381kg) settled for silver and bronze, respectively.

Nasiri said: "It was my own and the head coach's plan to start with a heavy lift and compete with my rivals for the snatch medal, but unfortunately, it did not work

out." "Thank God, things went well in the clean and jerk, and I was able to win the gold medal. I hope to overcome my tough rivals in future competitions. I want to dedicate this medal to the people of Iran."

Sunday's triumph was the latest testament to Nasiri's rise as a global contender in the heavyweight class. He won a clean sweep of three golds in the 109kg event at last year's World Junior Championships in Lima – adding to his two golds from the previous edition – and set junior world records of 231kg in the clean & jerk and 414kg in the total at the Senior World Championships in Forde, Norway, later in October.



● AWF

Kerman eyes UNESCO status for historic core

Iranica Desk

Deputy governor of Kerman Province for coordinating urban development affair has said that the general 70-hectare boundary proposed for the city's historic fabric has been approved in principle, but a detailed review is required to ensure that the majority of buildings within the area retain authentic historical value.

Speaking at a meeting on the progress of the UNESCO world heritage nomination dossier for Kerman's cultural and historic zone, Aliasghar Zakeri said the province possesses deep civilizational roots, and that any development effort in the region should be seen as part of the revival of an ancient heritage that has not yet received adequate attention, according to ISNA.

He stressed the importance of preserving the visual identity of historic districts, warning that mu-

nicipalities should avoid using incompatible materials and design elements within heritage zones. Even practical urban features such as signage and postal codes for historic buildings, he said, should incorporate identity-based elements such as tilework to help distinguish historic homes from other structures for both residents and visitors.

Zakeri emphasized that the objective is not merely the registration of heritage sites, but the preservation of a living civilization in the Middle East. He added that the provincial government would fully support coordination with Iran's cultural heritage authorities to achieve this goal.

He also called for a shift in public attitudes toward cultural heritage, noting that while official registration is important, the real achievement lies in long-term preservation and management. Experience, he said, shows that ob-



● mehrnews.com

taining national or global registration is easier than sustaining proper conservation, which requires strong determination and careful planning.

Highlighting the role of the private sector, Zakeri urged major economic enterprises and investors to participate in the restoration of the historic

fabric. Such involvement, he said, would not only protect cultural assets but also stimulate tourism and local economic growth. He further described the

restoration of historic buildings as an artistic endeavor rather than a purely technical task, stressing that designers, architects, and project supervisors must bring an artistic sensibility to ensure results that leave a lasting cultural impact.

Referring to Kerman's strong heritage potential, he noted that the city could play a significant national and international role, provided that administrative structures and inter-agency coordination are strengthened.

Zakeri also criticized the absence of a dedicated provincial tourism working group, calling for its immediate activation so that all permits and decisions in the sector can be reviewed within a structured framework.

To accelerate the UNESCO nomination process, he proposed forming a specialized task force under the main tourism committee to handle the docu-

mentation for the historic and cultural zone.

Reiterating the nomination plan, he confirmed that the 70-hectare historic core has been broadly approved, but insisted that the tourism master plan consultant must conduct a thorough reassessment to ensure that most buildings in the area possess genuine historical authenticity. He added that at least 70 percent of structures within the proposed zone must meet heritage value criteria for the nomination to succeed, and that all construction and restoration work must follow heritage standards while maintaining visual coherence.

Finally, he emphasized that any new construction within historic districts must align with local architectural identity, and called for strengthening heritage protection forces to prevent unauthorized destruction or inappropriate alterations in the area.

Kermanshah pushes tourism development in Sarab-e Niloufar corridor

Iranica Desk

The Deputy Governor for Civil Affairs of Kermanshah Province said the Kermanshah-Sarab-e Niloufar (Lotus Lake) corridor boasts exceptional natural attractions and stressed that relevant authorities must provide the necessary groundwork for major tourism projects in the area.

is located along the Karbala highway and is home to major historical and natural attractions such as the Bisotun historical complex and Taq-e Bostan.

He said the corridor's tourism potential is further enhanced by existing infrastructure, including highways, rail links, and an airport.

Despite these advantages,

rialized since then. He said part of the shortcoming lies with the agencies responsible for the sector.

He emphasized that the provincial administration is committed to preserving the corridor's potential and laying the groundwork for large-scale tourism and service investments. Relevant authorities, particularly the Cultural Heritage



● IRNA

Speaking at a meeting of the province's Infrastructure working group, Tahmasb Najafi said Kermanshah Province enjoys significant tourism potential due to its numerous historical landmarks, mountains, foothills, springs, and scenic natural landscapes.

He added that several tourism corridors have been designated across the province based on these capacities, including the Kermanshah-Oramanat, Kermanshah-Sarab-e Niloufar, and Kermanshah-Bisotun routes, according to IRNA. Najafi highlighted the strategic importance of the Kermanshah-Bisotun tourism corridor, noting that it

Najafi noted that no major developments have taken place along the corridor in recent years, adding that the transformative potential of this important tourism route has been seriously neglected.

He described the Sarab-e Niloufar corridor as part of the secondary route connecting Kermanshah to Oramanat, featuring scenic attractions such as Sarab-e Niloufar, picturesque plains, and mountain foothills.

According to Najafi, a tourism-oriented vision for the corridor was introduced in the 2000s, but no major investments in tourism or service sectors have mate-

and Tourism Department, have been instructed to submit development plans for the area.

Najafi also criticized unauthorized construction on natural resource lands, saying cases involving illegal land seizures must be pursued and violators held accountable before legal and oversight bodies. During the meeting, officials also reviewed a proposal to ban non-tourism-related construction within a 1,000-meter zone along the Sarab-e Niloufar corridor. Investment proposals in tourism, agriculture, and service sectors were among the other issues discussed.

Sirjan demonstrates rich heritage, expanding tourism potential

Iranica Desk

Kerman Province, as one of the largest and most geographically diverse provinces in Iran, enjoys a four-season climate, a long historical background, and a wide range of natural, cultural, and economic attractions. Thanks to its ancient cities, remarkable deserts, high mountains, and rich cultural heritage, the province is considered one of the key destinations for both domestic and international tourism.

Within this vast region, Sirjan stands out as one of the most important areas in western Kerman Province, with significant economic, logistical, and tourism importance. Covering more than 13,000 square kilometers, Sirjan is strategically located along the transit routes connecting Kerman, Fars, and Hormozgan provinces. This geographical position has turned the city into a key transportation hub in southeastern Iran, playing an important role in economic growth, trade exchanges, and the development of infrastructure and tourism services.

Beyond its economic significance, Sirjan also has a rich historical and cultural background. Over time, the city has been a point of cultural interaction and convergence, resulting in notable social and cultural diversity. The blend of urban life with rural and nomadic lifestyles has given the region a distinct identity, setting it apart from many surrounding areas. From a natural perspective, Sirjan is a diverse, four-season region. Its landscapes range from mountains and vast plains to protected areas and



Sang Castle
● wikipedia.org



Pateh embroidery
● botehjegheh.com

unique ecosystems, forming a valuable foundation for ecotourism and nature-based travel. This geographical and climatic diversity has gradually transformed the city into one of the emerging tourism destinations in Kerman Province, alongside its industrial and economic roles.

Ali Memarnejad, Deputy Head of Kerman Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, recently highlighted Sirjan's exceptional potential in an interview. He referred to the region's nomadic lifestyle, its numerous historical attractions, the Gohar Park recreational complex as the largest tourism village in the Middle East, and the Siah-Kuh Protected Area as a natural treasure. He also described the global registration of Shiriki Pich kilim as a lasting honor for the region.

He described Sirjan as a unique and fascinating destination for tourists, noting that one of its most distinctive features is its

nomadic character. The presence of mountains and suitable migration routes has historically attracted numerous tribes and nomads to the area, making nomadic culture a defining element of Sirjan's identity. He further emphasized the city's rich historical heritage, stating that sites such as Sang Castle, Shah Firuz's tomb, the historical bazaar, Imamzadeh Ali, Imamzadeh Seyyed Ahmad, Haji Rashid House, Sadrzadeh Mansion, and Saeediya Mansion are among the most important cultural and historical landmarks, each reflecting a different chapter of the region's history.

Memarnejad described the Gohar Park tourism village as a green jewel in the heart of Sirjan's desert. Developed with the support of Gol Gohar Mining and Industrial Company, it has become the largest recreational and tourism complex in the Middle East. The site features an artificial lake, amusement park, traditional and modern accommodation units, diverse restaurants, sports facilities, a zoo, advanced cinemas, horse-riding areas, and a Jurassic Park zone, offering visitors a wide range of recreational experiences.

He also highlighted Sirjan's natural attractions, including the Siah-Kuh Protected Area, which spans 45,000 hectares between the Sirjan-Bandar Abbas and Sirjan-Shiraz roads. This area is home to valuable vegetation and diverse wildlife species, making it ecologically significant.

Other natural attractions include the salt desert, Pariz village, and the Kuhpanj region. These features have turned Sirjan into a year-round destination for nature lovers and ecotourism enthusiasts.

He identified the handwoven Shiriki Pich Kilim as the most important handicraft and souvenir of Sirjan. Its traditional patterns and vibrant colors, created through the creativity of local weavers, led to its registration in 2017 on the list of global handicraft cities. He also mentioned Pateh embroidery, Masghati (a soft and transparent confection), pistachios, and Pashmak (a form of Iranian candy floss) as other valuable local products.

He emphasized that Sirjan, with its ancient history, dynamic culture, pristine nature, and modern tourism infrastructure, is fully prepared to host domestic and international tourists.

Iran seeks digital reboot to recount tourism for global audience

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran's cultural heritage, tourism and handicrafts minister on Sunday called for a sweeping shift toward digital storytelling and smarter media engagement, saying the country's vast historical and cultural assets must be repackaged for younger global audiences and international platforms if they are to remain competitive in the modern tourism economy. Speaking at a Communications and Public Relations Day gathering in Tehran, Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri said traditional communication models had reached their limits as tourism markets increasingly revolve around visual narratives, social media ecosystems and

digitally driven cultural branding, chtn.ir reported. "Today's tourism is meaningless without compelling content," Salehi-Amiri told ministry media executives and cultural officials, warning that "stagnation" posed the biggest threat to Iran's information and cultural sectors. The minister said Iran, home to more than one million historical sites alongside deserts, forests, waterfalls and mountain landscapes, holds one of the world's richest tourism portfolios but must "speak the language of the new generation" to translate those assets into international visibility. He urged public relations departments to move beyond merely reflecting officials' activities and instead focus on "creating narratives" capable

of engaging younger audiences living in what he described as a predominantly digital and networked environment. Salehi-Amiri also highlighted plans to expand the international reach of Iranian handicrafts through digital marketplaces and online retail platforms. "Iranian handicrafts must gain an effective presence in global markets and international platforms," he said, adding that consumers anywhere in the world should be able to purchase works produced by Iranian artisans. The minister said artificial intelligence, interactive storytelling, animation and short-form digital content were reshaping global media and tourism industries, pushing cultural institutions worldwide to overhaul outdated



Iran's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Minister Reza Salehi-Amiri attends a gathering in Tehran on May 17, 2026.
● CHTN

communication structures. In a separate note published to mark the national communications occasion, Salehi-Amiri described the current era as a "battle of narratives," arguing that countries unable to present their own cultural and civilizational image risk being defined by others. He said Iran needed a broader national narrative linking its historical legacy with a modern and future-oriented cultural identity, while strengthening public trust and international cultural outreach through dialogue-driven



communication rather than one-way messaging. Salehi-Amiri added that Iran's cultural heritage would remain

"alive and influential" only if integrated into the daily lives and digital habits of younger generations.

Tehran vows to pursue accountability for damaged heritage



Debris at the historical monument Golestan Palace in Tehran after it was damaged in an Israeli and US strike on March 3, 2026.
● REUTERS

Iran will document and pursue international legal accountability for damage inflicted on its cultural heritage during recent

US and Israeli attacks, Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs Kazem Gharibabadi said on May 17 to mark International Museum Day, as UNESCO and other in-

ternational bodies continue to voice concern over threats facing the country's historic sites. In a message posted on X on Sunday, Gharibabadi said this year's International Museum Day (May 18) carried a "different meaning" for Iran, where celebrations honoring the country's civilizational legacy have been overshadowed by damage to museums, historical landmarks and cultural institutions during the February 28 attacks, IRNA reported. "At least 149 historical sites

and museums across 20 provinces sustained damage," he said, adding that the toll included five UNESCO-listed properties, seven historic urban fabrics and 54 museums. He said the incidents had widened concerns beyond civilian casualties and the prohibition on the use of force, arguing that Iran's "historical and civilizational memory" had also come under attack. "Iran's cultural heritage is not merely a national possession," Gharibabadi wrote. "It forms part of the shared memory of humanity." The remarks came after UNESCO expressed concern in March over reported damage to several Iranian heritage sites, including areas sur-

rounding Tehran's Golestan Palace and historical districts in Isfahan. UNESCO officials later said the agency had intensified emergency monitoring efforts and shared coordinates of protected heritage sites with parties to the conflict in a bid to avert further destruction. Citing the 1954 Hague Convention and the core principles of international humanitarian law, Gharibabadi said cultural property must remain protected during armed conflict and "must not fall victim to aggression, military negligence or disregard for international legal obligations." Iranian cultural authorities have since launched extensive damage assessments and

preservation work at affected museums and monuments, while officials have stepped up diplomatic engagement with international heritage organizations. The attacks triggered reactions from archaeologists, museum experts and heritage scholars worldwide, with several international petitions warning that damage to Iran's ancient sites would represent an irreversible loss to world civilization. Gharibabadi said Tehran would continue documenting the incidents through international legal channels, adding that Iran would not allow "the history of the great Iranian nation to become a casualty of today's military and political objectives".

Ancient Khuttal symposium traces Persian roots linking Iran, Central Asia

Arts & Culture Desk

Archaeologists, historians and diplomats from Tajikistan, Iran and Russia gathered across southern Tajikistan to examine how the ancient region of Khuttal helped shape the Persian-Tajik language and broader Central Asian civilization, organizers said at the International Symposium on Ancient Khuttal held from May 10 to 14 in Dushanbe, Bokhtar and Nurek. The cultural forum, organized by Tajikistan's Khatlon regional administration and the state Agency for the Protection of Historical and Cultural Heritage, has turned renewed attention toward the deep historical ties linking



● IRNA

modern Tajikistan and Iran through the Persian language, literature and shared civilizational memory, IRNA reported. Khatlon Governor Davlati Said said the gathering aimed to deepen scholarly understanding of ancient Khuttal's role in regional culture and identity. Tajik presiden-

tial aide Anvar Safarzoda, heritage agency chief Shirali Khojzoda, and representatives from the Iranian and Russian embassies also attended. Iranian and Russian delegates highlighted the contribution of Persian-Tajik civilization to global scholarship,

culture and scientific thought, reflecting what participants described as a cross-border intellectual heritage that predates modern state boundaries. Tajik officials said more than 5,000 tangible and intangible cultural elements have been registered nationwide since the country gained independence. Of Tajikistan's 3,500 nationally and internationally significant historical sites, more than 900 are located in the ancient Khuttal region. Among the region's landmark sites are the Ajina Teppa Buddhist complex, the Hulbuk palace, Takht-i Sangin, Khoja Mashhad and the Stone Age museum of Kulobdara.

'Melatonin' lands in Oscar-qualifying Spain film festival

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian short film 'Melatonin,' directed by emerging filmmaker Hannaneh Daliri, was selected for the competition section of the 54th Huesca International Film Festival in Spain, marking the work's first international screening. Written and directed by Daliri and produced by Roozbeh Sajjadi Hosseini, the short will compete at the Oscar- and Goya-qualifying festival, known in European cinema circles for spotlighting independent productions and rising global talent, ILNA reported. Held annually in the northeastern Spanish city of Huesca, the festival has built a reputation as a key launchpad for short filmmakers seeking wider international recognition. This year's edition runs from June 5 to June 13. The Iranian production features a cast including Nazanin Keyvani, Mohammad Asgari, Sepinoud Delbarhassas, Abolfazl Khanpour, Ian Yarabigi and Amirabbas Nourzaei. Daliri's film joins a curated lineup of international shorts competing before industry figures, programmers and global audiences at one of Spain's prominent cinematic gatherings.



'Melatonin' is being introduced to overseas festivals by Tehran-based international sales company Artvision, headed by Ida Tebianian, as Iranian short cinema continues to expand its presence across major cultural events and independent film circuits worldwide.