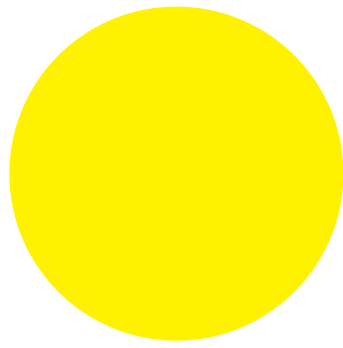


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## Border tourism, security, and social resilience in Iran's frontier regions



By Sharareh Abdolhoseinzadeh  
PhD in Political Science

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

In geopolitical literature, border regions are often described as "sensitive security zones." Yet in countries such as Iran, border provinces are far more than military frontiers. They are spaces where security, identity, economy, ethnicity, and regional politics intersect simultaneously.

Recent regional tensions once again demonstrated that crises in the Middle East are no longer confined to military dimensions alone. Economic stability, tourism flows, local livelihoods, and social cohesion in border provinces have increasingly become part of broader national security calculations.

This issue is particularly important for Iran because many border provinces are not only strategically located but also ethnically and culturally diverse. Provinces such as West Azarbaijan, Kurdistan, Kermanshah, Khuzestan, Sistan and Baluchestan, and Hormozgan occupy a dual position: they function simultaneously as security frontiers and as cultural-economic gateways connecting Iran to neighboring regions.

For this reason, tourism in border areas should not be understood merely as a leisure industry. In many cases, tourism infrastructure forms part of the country's broader resilience architecture.

Hotels, eco-lodges, transportation corridors, local markets, and cultural tourism networks do more than generate income. They help sustain employment, strengthen local attachment to place, reduce economic marginalization, and preserve social stability during periods of uncertainty.

From a theoretical perspective, this issue can be understood through the concept of "societal resilience." Contemporary security studies increasingly emphasize that national security is not maintained solely through military deterrence. States also require resilient local economies, functioning social networks, and stable border communities capable of absorbing political and economic shocks.

Recent crises in the region demonstrated that local economies in frontier provinces are highly vulnerable to disruptions in tourism and transportation. Declining travel demand, rising uncertainty, interruptions in trade routes, and media-driven security fears can rapidly weaken fragile local economies.

However, the strategic danger extends beyond economics alone.

When border economies experience prolonged instability, broader social and security consequences may emerge, including unemployment, migration pressures, declining trust in local governance, and increased vulnerability to external influence campaigns.

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# Qalibaf says Iran will judge US actions, not words

Negotiators reportedly strike deal to extend ceasefire



Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf  
IRNA

## International Desk

Iran's top negotiator said on Friday that Tehran does not trust guarantees and words, and would judge the other side by its actions as there are reports of an agreement between Iran and the United States to extend their ceasefire and start a new round of talks.

"We have no trust in guarantees or words - only actions are the measure," Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said in a statement shared on X. "No action will be taken before the other side acts."

"We seize concessions not through dialogue, but with missiles; in negotiations, we merely make them understand", Qalibaf added.

He also said the winner of any agreement is the one who is better prepared for war from the day after. His comments came after

western media reported Iran and the United States have edged toward an agreement to extend their ceasefire for 60 days and launch new negotiations, though US President Donald Trump has yet to approve it, and Iranian state media says it has not been finalized.

US sources speaking to AFP also confirmed reporting by Axios that the two sides had agreed on a memorandum of understanding to prolong the ceasefire and launch negotiations on Iran's nuclear program.

Under the proposed deal, shipping through the Strait of Hormuz would be unrestricted, with no tolls; Iran would remove all mines within 30 days; and the US would lift its naval blockade if commercial traffic resumes, Axios reported. But Iran's Tasnim News

Agency, citing a source close to Tehran's negotiators, said the text had not been finalized.

Iranian sources cited by local media said any deal would be complete only when announced by Tehran, not unilaterally by the US president.

On Thursday, US Vice President JD Vance confirmed there was a tentative agreement, adding that negotiations had "made a lot of progress."

But he said it was unclear if President Donald Trump would approve it.

"It's hard to say exactly when or if the president's going to sign," Vance told reporters.

"We're going back and forth on a couple of language points," he added.

The development came amid renewed exchange of fire between the two sides.

Tehran on Thursday accused Washington of violating the truce following new attacks on areas in the southern port city of Bandar Abbas in Iran.

The US strikes prompted Iran to target "the American airbase that served as the source of the attack," state broadcaster IRIB reported, citing the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).

The IRGC did not specify the location of the base, but Kuwait, which hosts US troops, said its air defenses responded to incoming fire. Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baqaei strongly condemned the US violations of the ceasefire, emphasizing Iran's determination to take all necessary measures to defend its national sovereignty and territorial integrity in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter.

## Leader urges safeguarding national unity amid US-Israeli aggression



Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei  
IRNA

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution said the United States and Israel, who have failed in their military aggression on Iran, are plotting to sow discord inside Iran.

"The blind scheme and plot of the enemy - following the imposed war, economic pressure, and propaganda and siege - is to sow discord and social fragmentation in order to compensate for its defeats on the military field and bring the nation to its knees," Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei said in a message on Thursday, Press TV reported. The message came on the anniversary of the first session of the Islamic Consultative Assembly - Iran's Parliament - which was officially inaugurated on May 28, 1980.

The Leader described the Islamic Consultative Assembly as "the essence of the nation, the manifestation of religious democracy, and the pillar of law and legislation in the Islamic Republic," saying it plays a vital role in exercising the will of the people.

Noting that three months have passed since the "third Sacred Defense," Ayatollah Khamenei said the Iranian people's inner character and essence, "in faith, hope, and action", has been prov-

en to both friends and foes.

He was referring to the US-Israeli aggression on Iran that began on February 28 and came to a halt on April 8 following Iran's strong retaliatory attacks against US and Israeli bases across the region during forty days of defense. "The seat of a representative is considered a frontline trench of transformation on the path of the country's progress," he said, urging parliamentarians to devote their full capacity, and to be in full coordination with the administration while preserving legislative independence towards the goal.

He listed the priorities as "reconstructing the country, resolving the people's concerns - especially economic and livelihood issues - boosting production and employment, advancing science and industry, elevating culture and ethics, fighting financial corruption, curbing inflation and high prices, and realizing total eradication of poverty."

On that basis, he said, parliamentary legislation "must have a direct and visible relationship with the country's main issues and the needs of the people, and must be oriented toward creating hope and building the country's future."

## Iran's policy is to expand cooperation with Muslim, neighboring countries: *Pezeshkian*



Masoud Pezeshkian  
IRNA

## International Desk

President Masoud Pezeshkian said that expanding cooperation with Muslim and neighboring countries across all fields remains Tehran's steadfast policy, as the Islamic Republic continues to face military aggression from the United States and Israel.

In a post on his X account on Friday, Pezeshkian said he had spoken by telephone with the prime ministers of Malaysia and Pakistan to exchange

Eid al-Adha greetings. He thanked Malaysia for its "humanitarian stance" and expressed appreciation for Pakistan's "initiative and effective efforts to reach an agreement."

"Iran's policy is to expand cooperation with Muslim and neighboring countries in all fields," Pezeshkian wrote.

The president's post capped several days of intensive telephone diplomacy. Since May 25, Pezeshkian has held conversations with the lead-

ers of Iraq, Malaysia, Qatar, Egypt, Turkey, Oman, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan.

In his call with Iraqi President Nizar Amidi and Prime Minister Ali Falih al-Zaidi, Pezeshkian discussed strengthening bilateral relations and coordinating regional positions.

With Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, he thanked Kuala Lumpur for its humanitarian stance on regional issues. During his conversation with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, the two sides reviewed bilateral relations and Qatar's continued diplomatic engagement.

Pezeshkian told Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi he was confident that "a new chapter" in regional relations would emerge once current tensions subside, built on unity within the Islamic world and rejection of external interference.

In his call with Turkish President Recep Tayyip

Erdogan, the two leaders discussed expanding economic cooperation and coordinating positions on regional security.

The Iranian president also spoke with Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said, thanking Muscat for its longstanding role as a dip-

lomatic mediator.

With Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, Pezeshkian expressed appreciation for Islamabad's efforts in mediating between Tehran and Washington, with Sharif expressing hope that a peace agreement would

"soon move towards finalization."

Calls with Tajik President Emomali Rahmon, Kyrgyz President Sadyr Japarov and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev focused on deepening cultural and economic ties among neighboring and Mus-

lim-majority states.

Across all the conversations, Pezeshkian emphasized that Iran has proven its sincerity and commitment to the path of dialogue and remains ready to reach a dignified framework agreement to end tensions.



Iranian offshore  
Engineering & Construction

First Announcement

Call for Tender 1<sup>st</sup> Announcement  
for Purchase of Hub Connector  
for Belal Gas Field Development Project

Tender No. 1011012

Iranian Offshore Engineering and Construction Company intends to purchase the Tender of Hub Connector for Belal Gas Field Development Project through a public tender. Therefore, the applicants are allowed to have 30 days after the date of 2<sup>st</sup> publication of the tender notice in the newspaper to participate in this tender. To download the tender documents, please visit the tender's section of the IOEC's website: [WWW.IOEC.COM/EN/TENDERS](http://WWW.IOEC.COM/EN/TENDERS), and Please do not hesitate to contact with Transaction Committee office with Tel: +9821-82841632 under sign for any inquiries and more information.

# President urges rapid activation of alternative import routes



president.ir

## Economy Desk

President Masoud Pezeshkian on Friday directed officials to speed up the activation of alternative import channels and maximize use of neighboring countries' capacity to ensure supplies of essential goods and medicine amid restrictions on

southern port imports, state media reported.

Speaking at a meeting attended by economic authorities, the central bank governor, and other senior officials to review supplies of essential goods, pharmaceuticals, and alternative import routes, Pezeshkian stressed the importance of maintaining

market stability and preventing price fluctuations, according to IRNA.

Discussions centered on maintaining supply chains and expanding logistical, commercial and diplomatic capacities following restrictions affecting some southern entry points.

The president also called on the Foreign Ministry to strengthen economic diplomacy efforts to help secure imports and sustain supply flows.

"We must use all of the country's political, economic and regional capacities to facilitate the purchase, transport, customs clearance and entry of essential goods and medicine so that supplies reach the public without disruption," Pezeshkian said, adding that he was ready to personally coordinate with leaders of neighboring countries and regional partners to swiftly remove any barriers to their supply and transport.

Officials reviewed the latest

status of imports of essential goods, medicine and industrial inputs, as well as measures taken to establish alternative routes.

The country faces growing external economic and maritime pressure, including US restrictions targeting its shipping and oil trade through a naval blockade imposed since mid-April. US President Donald Trump imposed the sea-based embargo on Iranian ports on April 13, aiming to pressure Tehran into a peace agreement after a 40-day conflict that began in late February. Iran is seeking to diversify logistics corridors to counter the restrictions.

According to reports presented by economic officials, coordination with neighboring countries has helped activate and expand capacity at several land border crossings and alternative transport corridors to facilitate imports of essential goods.

Pezeshkian instructed the Ag-

riculture Ministry to adopt "precise, continuous and forward-looking" planning to ensure that restrictions at some border crossings do not drive up the prices of essential goods and medicines.

He also emphasized the need to make greater use of northern ports, develop alternative trade routes, and tap the capacities of neighboring countries such as Pakistan, Russia, and Azerbaijan to secure essential imports, while urging the swift implementation of relevant agreements.

The president ordered the economy ministry to establish specialized task forces for different categories of goods to streamline decision-making and accelerate identification of supplier countries and import procedures.

At the meeting, officials also examined the feasibility of importing medicine and other critical goods from China through rail

routes, while emphasizing the need to strengthen combined transport infrastructure and improve resilience of supply chains.

Central Bank Governor Abdolnaser Hemmati also presented a report at the meeting on the status of foreign exchange allocation and financial resources required for importing essential goods and pharmaceuticals, affirming that no impediments exist in financing these items and that necessary support will be sustained on a continuous basis. Separately, Ezzatollah Zarei, spokesperson for Iran's industry ministry, said that authorities had identified new trade corridors and were taking necessary measures through alternative routes.

"This does not mean there are no problems, but it means there is no deadlock, and with the cooperation of all stakeholders, this phase will also be overcome," Zarei said.

## Iran, Kazakhstan target \$3b trade volume, pledge expanded economic cooperation



mimt.gov.ir

## Economy Desk

Iran and Kazakhstan on Thursday emphasized expanding economic cooperation and raising bilateral trade volume to \$3 billion, state media reported.

Iran's Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade and Kazakhstan's Minister of Trade and Integration stressed the goal during talks in Astana on the eve of the Eurasian Economic Union summit, according to IRNA. "The industrial and economic capacities of the two countries have made achieving the \$3 billion trade target feasible," Iran's Industry Minister Mohammad Atabak said. "A specialized working group will be formed to operationalize areas of cooperation at the expert level, and the specialized deputy ministries of the Industry, Mine and Trade Ministry are tasked with pursuing various branches of Iran-Kazakhstan cooperation." Atabak identified resolving banking obstacles as the key to expanding bilateral trade. "The trade agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union has created the groundwork for facilitating inter-bank transactions between traders of the two countries," he said. "Iran is also prepared to cooperate, where appropriate, on using barter trade capacity in areas

including steel, iron, grains, oil, sunflower, meal and various minerals," Atabak added.

The two sides agreed to expand technical and engineering services exports, establish science and technology parks, exchange industrial expertise, develop logistics and rail transport, and boost food product trade.

The meeting aimed to lay groundwork for realizing a shared commercial vision and maximizing benefits from the Eurasian Economic Union agreement, with executive actions to be pursued through a joint working group.

Atabak, who traveled to Astana to attend the 5th Eurasian Economic Forum (EEF-2026), also delivered a message from Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian to the gathering, which brought together 140 representatives from more than 30 countries and 20 international organizations. In the message, Pezeshkian described Iran's active participation in Eurasian Union meetings as reflecting Tehran's serious commitment to expanding strategic relations with members of the economic bloc and called for accelerating the removal of structural barriers to realizing high trade potential.

In another part of his message, the president described cooperation with union members as a

long-term strategy for regional convergence, and citing cultural, historical and geographical commonalities, emphasized the need to fully leverage existing opportunities to create a successful model of multilateral cooperation.

The 5th Eurasian Economic Forum (EEF-2026) was held May 28-29 in Astana, under the main theme "The EAEU in the Global Digital Race: Betting on Artificial Intelligence."

On the sidelines of the forum, Atabak met with Kazakhstan's Minister of Industry and Construction, Kanat Sharlapaev, where they agreed to draft and sign bilateral memorandums of understanding to framework cooperation and facilitate implementation of industrial plans. A key focus of the talks was addressing financial challenges facing contractors and industrialists from both countries. In this regard, the sides agreed to establish necessary mechanisms to facilitate issuance of bank guarantees aimed at ensuring implementation of joint projects and supporting active companies in these sectors.

Kazakhstan's Minister of Industry and Construction welcomed the proposals and emphasized his country's readiness to provide legal and executive frameworks for more active presence of Iranian companies in Kazakhstan's industrial projects.

The meeting, considered an important step toward strengthening economic relations in the Eurasian region, concluded with emphasis on continuing expert-level consultations to finalize the memorandums.

## New US aviation sanctions show anger over Iran's fast recovery: CAO

A senior Iranian aviation official dismissed Washington's latest threats against Iranian airlines, describing them as a reflection of US frustration over the rapid recovery of Iran's civil aviation sector after the US-Israeli aggression.

Hamidreza Sanei, deputy head of the Civil Aviation Organization for international affairs, said on Friday that comments by US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent about new restrictions on Iranian carriers did not amount to a formal sanctions measure, Press TV reported.

"This is the second time the Treasury Secretary has made such a claim, but no legal action, formal sanctions order, or binding decision containing the details of this matter has been seen beyond what he posted on X," Sanei said.

According to Sanei, the remarks appear to be driven more by anger over the revival of Iran's air transport sector despite extensive wartime damage than by any established legal or regulatory process.

Bessent had written on X that Washington would be "shutting down both Iranian airlines' access to landing spots, refueling, and ticket sales," though he did not identify the airlines involved or provide additional details. Iran Air has previously been designated by the US State Department, while Mahan Air is also under US sanctions.

Sanei argued that repeated threats against civilian aviation infrastructure highlight the sector's importance to the national economy, including the trans-



IRNA

port of essential goods such as medicine and automotive components, as well as meeting the travel needs of the public.

The US pressure comes as Iran's aviation sector has recovered more quickly than many observers had expected.

Iran's civilian airports sustained significant damage during the 40-day war. Mohammad Reza Rezaei-Kouchi, chairman of Parliament's Construction Committee, said in April that 10 passenger aircraft were destroyed and another 50 damaged in US-Israeli attacks on civilian airports during the conflict, which began on February 28 and ended on April 8 following a Pakistan-brokered ceasefire.

He said some of the damaged aircraft can be repaired and returned to service. Rezaei-Kouchi added that Iran is seeking compensation directly from the states it holds responsible for the attacks and is also pursuing the matter through correspondence with the International Civil Aviation Organization.

The US-Israeli military campaign also struck civilian airport infrastructure, including control towers, runways, navigation facilities, and ground

communication systems, despite such sites being protected under international humanitarian law.

Even so, within two months of the ceasefire, 21 airports — accounting for about 40% of Iran's civilian airport network — have resumed operations.

Among the facilities most heavily damaged was Tabriz International Airport, Iran's third-largest international airport by traffic. The airport reopened to flights on Wednesday after missile attacks had damaged its control tower and parts of its main runway.

Reconstruction work was carried out entirely with domestic expertise and locally manufactured aviation equipment, reflecting a broader push for self-reliance that has developed over years of sanctions.

The recovery effort was implemented in stages. Authorities first focused on airports in the eastern parts of the country, which were farthest from the conflict zone, helping restore overflight revenues from regional air corridors. Reconstruction then expanded to airports in central and western Iran.

## Border tourism, security ...

This is especially significant in ethnically diverse border regions, where economic marginalization can sometimes intensify feelings of exclusion or deepen social fragmentation. In such contexts, economic resilience becomes directly connected to national cohesion and long-term stability. For this reason, maintaining economic activity and tourism infrastructure in border provinces during periods of crisis should be viewed not merely as an economic policy, but as a preventive security

strategy.

The recent use of tourism infrastructure during crisis conditions also revealed an important transformation in the function of tourism itself. Hotels, schools, eco-lodges, transportation systems, and local service networks increasingly acted as emergency support infrastructure capable of assisting population movement, temporary accommodation, and crisis coordination.

This demonstrates that tourism infrastructure in frontier regions possesses a

dual function:

economic and security-related simultaneously.

Another important dimension concerns the symbolic role of border tourism in reinforcing national integration. Cultural tourism, local heritage projects, and cross-border social interactions can strengthen perceptions of inclusion and shared national identity while reducing isolation in peripheral regions.

In many ways, border tourism operates not only as an economic activity but also

as a mechanism of "soft territorial consolidation." It connects peripheral regions more closely to national economic and cultural systems.

At the same time, the persistence of regional instability means that traditional approaches to border development may no longer be sufficient. Frontier regions today require integrated strategies combining: security management, economic resilience, local participation, digital infrastructure, transportation connectivity, and sustainable tourism development.

Without such integrated policies, repeated regional crises may gradually erode both economic stability and social cohesion in vulnerable frontier provinces.

Ultimately, one of the most important strategic lessons of recent regional tensions is that border security can no longer be understood solely through military frameworks. In the contemporary Middle East, resilient border economies and socially stable frontier communities have become essential components of national security itself.

# Why Washington misread Iran

## Contradictions in 2025 US National Security Strategy



By Kamran Yeganegi

Political analyst

### OPINION EXCLUSIVE

Recent geopolitical developments suggest that the Middle East is entering a new phase of strategic transformation in which power, security and regional political economy are being fundamentally redefined. In this context, the 2025 US National Security Strategy can be regarded as one of Washington's most important strategic documents for understanding America's evolving perception of the international system — and particularly the Middle East.

The document attempts to portray an America moving away from costly military entanglements in the region and redirecting its strategic focus toward competition with China, technological supremacy, artificial intelligence, critical supply chains and the Indo-Pacific. Yet despite this declared shift, a major contradiction remains between the strategy outlined in the document and Washington's practical approach toward Iran. This contradiction not only weakens the coherence of US foreign policy, but also risks reproducing instability across an already fragile regional order.

At its core, the strategy reflects an unresolved tension within American grand strategy itself. Washington simultaneously seeks to reduce the Middle East's strategic weight while continuing to preserve the same security architecture that historically defined US regional engagement. The result is a policy framework trapped between geopolitical retrenchment and geopolitical persistence.

#### Contradiction between strategic retrenchment and continued confrontation

The 2025 strategy explicitly argues that the United States is no longer structurally dependent on Middle Eastern oil. As a result of America's transformation into one of the world's largest energy producers and exporters, the Middle East is increasingly framed not as a core energy-security imperative but rather as a region of investment opportunities, technological partnerships and emerging geo-economic projects.

At least theoretically, this signals the end of a historical era in which the security of the Persian Gulf was considered indispensable to US national security. During much of the 20th century, Washington's Middle East policy was fundamentally shaped by the need to guarantee uninterrupted energy flows to global markets. Today, however, American strategic documents increasingly emphasize resilience, technological competition and economic diversification over direct military dominance.

Yet Washington's practical behavior still reflects the logic of the old security paradigm. Continued military deployments across the Persian Gulf, persistent security tensions, extensive arms sales and sustained efforts to contain Iran indicate that the United States has not truly moved beyond the traditional geopolitical mindset that has shaped its regional policy for decades.

This is perhaps the central contradiction of the new American strategy: while Washington seeks to reduce the strategic centrality of the Middle East, its own policies continue to deepen regional polarization and security competition.

The contradiction becomes even more apparent when examining American military behavior after recent regional crises. Despite repeated declarations about reducing military exposure, the United States continues to expand deterrence operations, strengthen naval deployments and reinforce security com-



The illustration shows, from left to right, a cargo ship, a partial map of the energy routes in the Persian Gulf, and a silhouette of US President Donald Trump.

THE ATLANTIC

mitments across the Persian Gulf. Such actions suggest that Washington itself remains uncertain whether the region has truly lost its strategic significance. In reality, the United States appears caught between two competing visions. The first envisions a gradual strategic withdrawal from the Middle East in favor of Asia and technological competition. The second reflects the enduring belief that instability in the Persian Gulf can still threaten global economic order and American influence. The inability to reconcile these two visions has produced a fragmented and often contradictory policy toward Iran.

#### Misreading Iran's geopolitical reality

One of the most significant analytical flaws within the strategy lies in its interpretation of Iran's regional role. The document increasingly portrays Iran as a manageable challenge, implying that Tehran no longer occupies a central position in American strategic calculations.

This assumption appears to stem from a broader belief that declining US dependence on Middle Eastern energy automatically reduces Iran's geopolitical significance. Yet such a conclusion over-



Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush sails in the Indian Ocean in the US Central Command area of responsibility on April 23, 2026.

US CENTRAL COMMAND

looks the complexity of Iran's position in the regional order.

Iran's importance extends far beyond oil exports. Geographically, Iran remains one of the most strategically positioned states in the world. Its influence over the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, the Sea of Oman and major regional transit corridors gives Tehran enduring geopolitical relevance. In addition, Iran's demographic scale, regional networks, military capabilities and civilizational depth ensure that it cannot simply be reduced to a secondary regional actor.

Iran also occupies a unique position at the intersection of multiple geopolitical spaces. It simultaneously connects the Middle East, Central Asia, the Caucasus, South Asia and emerging Eurasian trade corridors. This multidimensional geography gives Iran strategic relevance that cannot be measured solely through energy statistics.

Recent crises have demonstrated that instability involving Iran can still affect maritime security, global energy transportation routes, shipping insurance markets and broader economic stability. Even if the United States itself imports less oil from the Middle East, the global economy remains highly sensitive to disruptions in the region.

For this reason, the assumption that the world has already entered a "post-energy geopolitics" era appears premature. Oil may no longer dominate international politics in the same manner as before, but energy security continues to shape financial markets, inflation, transportation systems and industrial production worldwide.

Moreover, Iran's regional influence cannot be understood exclusively through



military calculations. Tehran possesses significant ideological, political and cultural influence across multiple regional arenas. This influence has evolved over decades through complex historical relationships, strategic partnerships and shared security perceptions. Any strategy that reduces Iran merely to a military containment issue risks misunderstanding the broader foundations of Iranian regional power.

#### Incomplete transition from energy geopolitics to geo-economics

The US strategy correctly recognizes that the Middle East is gradually transitioning from an oil-centered regional order toward a technology-driven geo-economic landscape. Persian Gulf states are heavily investing in artificial intelligence, renewable energy, advanced defense industries, digital infrastructure and smart-city projects.

This reflects a broader transformation in which technological capability, data infrastructure and innovation ecosystems are becoming more important than traditional hydrocarbon wealth alone. Economic diversification programs across the Persian Gulf increasingly seek to redefine regional influence through technology, logistics, finance and digital connectivity rather than purely through energy exports.

However, the strategy underestimates a critical reality: such a transformation requires long-term regional stability. Technological modernization and sustainable investment cannot flourish amid chronic geopolitical tensions and prolonged security confrontations.

In this regard, Washington's continued pressure-oriented approach toward Iran risks undermining the very regional environment necessary for the emergence of the technology-centered Middle East envisioned in its own strategy.

Foreign investors, multinational technology firms and global financial institutions prioritize predictability and stability. Persistent regional crises increase insurance costs, reduce investor confidence and complicate long-term infrastructure planning. A Middle East constantly threatened by escalation cannot fully transform into a globally competitive innovation hub.

This contradiction is especially important because the future Middle East will likely be shaped less by traditional military power and more by economic corridors, digital infrastructure, technological integration and artificial intelligence governance. In such an environment, exclusionary security policies become increasingly incompatible with sustainable regional development.

#### Security architecture without Iran?

Another contradiction within the strategy concerns Washington's reliance on regional security alliances designed largely around containing Iran. The United States appears committed to constructing a new regional order centered on Arab-Israeli partnerships, integrated defense systems and security normalization.

Yet the problem is that this architecture is defined more by exclusion than by collective security.

Historical experience in the Middle East suggests that durable regional stability cannot be achieved by ignoring or isolating one of the region's principal geopolitical actors. Attempts to institutionalize a regional order without Iran's participation are likely to intensify strategic competition, deepen mistrust and accelerate arms races across the region.

The Middle East has repeatedly demonstrated that security structures based solely on deterrence often produce unintended consequences. Exclusion generates counter-balancing behavior,



Another contradiction within the strategy concerns Washington's reliance on regional security alliances designed largely around containing Iran. The United States appears committed to constructing a new regional order centered on Arab-Israeli partnerships, integrated defense systems and security normalization. Yet the problem is that this architecture is defined more by exclusion than by collective security.

strengthens hardline security thinking and reduces opportunities for regional diplomacy. A sustainable regional security framework requires inclusive diplomacy rather than permanent geopolitical exclusion. This does not necessarily imply the absence of competition between regional powers. Rivalries will continue to exist. However, effective regional order requires mechanisms capable of managing competition rather than endlessly escalating it. Without such mechanisms, instability becomes structurally embedded within the regional system itself. The long-term challenge for Washington is that military alliances alone cannot provide political legitimacy for regional order. Stability ultimately depends on whether regional actors themselves perceive the security architecture as balanced, inclusive and sustainable.

**The missing element: intellectual and academic diplomacy**  
Perhaps one of the most overlooked dimensions of the 2025 US National Security Strategy is its limited attention to intellectual, academic and societal dialogue in regional conflict management. The crises of the Middle East are not purely military or security-related. They are also rooted in mutual mistrust, competing historical narratives, weak communication channels and the absence of sustainable regional dialogue mechanisms. Military deterrence alone cannot create lasting stability. The region increasingly requires what may be described as “elite diplomacy” — a framework in which universities, think tanks, scholars and intellectuals contribute to confidence-building, conflict reduction and regional understanding. Without such mechanisms, geopolitical tensions

are likely to reproduce themselves regardless of shifting military balances. Academic diplomacy can serve as an important bridge where formal political negotiations fail. Intellectual engagement helps reduce strategic misperceptions, promotes communication among regional elites and creates space for long-term confidence-building initiatives. Historically, many major geopolitical rivalries were eventually moderated not only through military balance but also through sustained intellectual and institutional dialogue. The Middle East today suffers from a severe deficit of such dialogue mechanisms. A future-oriented regional strategy should therefore invest not only in military alliances and economic projects, but also in educational exchanges, regional research institutions and platforms for sustained policy dialogue among regional actors.

**A strategic reality Washington cannot ignore**  
Ultimately, Iran cannot simply be defined as a manageable security challenge. Iran constitutes an integral part of the Middle East’s geopolitical, historical and civilizational structure. Any future regional order that attempts to marginalize Iran or reduce its role to a containment problem will inevitably face structural limitations. The central issue is not whether Washington agrees with Iranian regional policies. Rather, the issue is whether American strategy is prepared to recognize that durable regional stability requires acknowledging geopolitical realities instead of attempting to bypass them. The Middle East is no longer entering an era defined exclusively by oil geopolitics or traditional military competition.

The region is gradually evolving toward a more complex environment shaped by technology, connectivity, economics and strategic interdependence. Yet this transition cannot succeed under conditions of permanent confrontation and strategic exclusion. The future stability of the region will depend not only on military deterrence, but also on whether regional and global actors can construct a more inclusive security framework capable of balancing competition with cooperation. The fundamental question today is whether Washington is prepared to fundamentally reconsider its understanding of Iran and the Middle East — or whether it will continue attempting to manage an increasingly complex region through outdated geopolitical assumptions. The future of regional stability may depend largely on the answer.

# Rearming after war a challenge for Persian Gulf states

**By Albert Vidal Ribe**  
Research associate at the International Institute for Strategic Studies

Although most Arab Persian Gulf states had invested heavily in air- and missile-defence systems during the past decade, Iran’s missile and uninhabited aerial vehicle (UAV) attacks in 2026 have depleted magazines and highlighted capability gaps that those countries are now seeking to fill. However, demand for these systems is at an all-time high and production of many of them remains slow.

**Persian Gulf states go shopping**  
In recent weeks, the Persian Gulf states have accelerated their search for new air-defence systems after suffering from thousands of Iranian missile and UAV attacks. South Korea, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States are among those countries that have been approached by Persian Gulf states interested in near-term acquisitions, which include interceptor missiles, interceptor UAVs, point-defence systems, radar and surface-to-air missile systems (see Table 1). Some Persian Gulf states are also exploring accelerating the delivery of existing orders. The US has approved over \$41 billion in emergency arms sales to the Persian Gulf states since March 19 (of which \$17bn went unannounced), with around half of it allocated to Patriot interceptors. Meanwhile, on March 18, the UK government convened a meeting of 13 defence companies and Persian Gulf ambassadors and defence attachés to explore how the UK’s defence industry could support its partners in the region. London also created a task force to help fast-track financing and licensing of defence exports to its Persian Gulf partners. Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy visited the Persian Gulf in March and again in April and May, signing defence agreements with Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). These agreements could be the foundation of co-production partnerships and build manufacturing capacity in Ukraine and the Persian Gulf. Zelenskyy said on April 10 that discussions were also ongoing with Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman.

**Challenges**  
Despite this rush of activity, replenishing stocks of more advanced weaponry, such as the US Patriot long-range air- and missile-defence system, will not be easy, requiring a swift freeing-up of additional funding amid economic strain. Long lead times, supply-chain bottlenecks, workforce constraints and material availability also pose challenges to

manufacturing at speed. Downsizing in the US and European defence-industrial base in the 1990s led to lower production rates and contraction within the supply chain. In the guided-weapons realm, this trend was particularly true for rocket motors in the US. There have been recent efforts by US President Donald Trump’s second administration to expand production, but growth has been slower than hoped for. COVID-19 caused production and supply-chain issues, and saw many experienced staff retire early. Relatively high inflation and energy costs have eaten away at much of the recent extra investment. In Europe, multinational production has often been determined by industrial politics rather than economic efficiency, and China’s restrictions on the export of critical raw materials in 2023 and 2025 have caused further problems. Meanwhile, new staff and factories take several years to come online. After overcoming long lead times and supply-chain constraints, the US and Israel will still need to first re-stock their own inventories of missile interceptors, having used hundreds to defend against Iranian attacks. Even before the recent conflict, customers of US systems had experienced delays to delivery as a result of the US prioritising refilling its own inventories and supplying Ukraine and Taiwan. In Europe, Ukrainian demand is often the priority for deliveries. Moreover, many European countries are planning to significantly increase their air-defence forces and magazine depths, which might further disadvantage extra-regional customers. The Arab Persian Gulf states have long had big ambitions for their own defence industries, which have included development and production of air-defence systems. However, the UAE is the only country in the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council indigenously developing air-defence systems, and most relevant programmes are still under development, with some at an early stage. And even if some programmes, such as the Shadow-3 interceptor UAV, reach production and are eventually fielded, they could struggle to compete against combat-proven counterparts.

**Low-cost solutions to fill the gap**  
While all countries continue to grapple with production challenges for the more complex air-defence systems, a range of low-cost systems are now available. Although there are production challenges for some of these systems, such as China’s dominance in the production of dual-use components relevant to low-cost UAVs, they are less expensive and often delivered much more quickly. Many of these systems have also been proven against similar one-way attack UAVs in Ukraine. These



interceptor drones, lasers or gun systems cannot replace the capabilities provided by ballistic-missile-defence systems such as Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), but they can deal with Iran’s own lower-cost offensive systems such as Shahed UAVs. As the Persian Gulf states’ industrial capabilities remain limited in this area, they will need to continue partnering with external actors. Official claims that the UAE neutralised 85% of the UAVs targeting the country with locally made jammers such as NAVCONTROL should be taken with caution. The UK’s recent announcement of a contract for Cambridge Aerospace’s Skyhammer interceptor, both for itself and Persian Gulf partners, provides one such example. BAE Systems’ APKWS-II, of which the US has approved combined sales of 11,500 to the Persian Gulf states since March, is seen as another low-cost solution against UAVs. Zelenskyy’s tour of the region and conclusion of several defence agreements represent yet another strand of this trend. Although the details of these deals have not been disclosed, Ukraine’s conflict experience, proficiency in air-defence hardware and ability to coordinate different “sensors and shooters” could be of significant value. Since late 2024, Kyiv has begun to re-emerge as a potential exporter of defence technology and know-how rather than simply a recipient, but its own demand continues to be high and it remains to be seen how Ukraine’s offer of help will work in practice.

**Outlook**  
The challenge for the Persian Gulf states will not end when the deliveries are completed. They will then need to integrate these systems into their forces, create adequate training pipelines and adjust their doctrines and defensive postures.

The article was first published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

After overcoming long lead times and supply-chain constraints, the US and Israel will still need to first re-stock their own inventories of missile interceptors, having used hundreds to defend against Iranian attacks. Even before the recent conflict, customers of US systems had experienced delays to delivery as a result of the US prioritising refilling its own inventories and supplying Ukraine and Taiwan. In Europe, Ukrainian demand is often the priority for deliveries.

Visitors stand in front of a Fatah-II guided rocket (1) and a SMASH anti-ship missile during the World Defence Show in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on February 9, 2026. **FAYEZ NURELDINE/AFP**

**Table 1: Selected requests, expressions of interest, FMS approvals and contract signings for air-defence systems by the Arab Gulf states since March 2026**

Recipient	Designation	Classification	Supplier	Supplier country	Status
UAE	Cheongung-II (KM-SAM Block II)	MR SAM System	LIG Nex1	South Korea	Deliveries in progress*
Kuwait	AMRAAM-ER	MR SAM System	Raytheon	US	Contract signed**
Saudi Arabia	Cheongung-II (KM-SAM Block II)	MR SAM System	LIG Nex1	South Korea	Contract signed***
UAE	P-1 Sun	Interceptor UAV	SkyFall	Ukraine	Contract signed
Several Gulf states	Skyhammer	Interceptor Missile	Cambridge Aerospace	UK	Contract signed
Kuwait	Lower Tier Air and Missile Defense Sensor Radars	Radar	RTX	US	FMS approval
Kuwait	Integrated Battle Command System	C2 System	Northrop Grumman; RTX; Lockheed Martin	US	FMS approval
Qatar; UAE	APKWS-II	ASM	BAE Systems	US	FMS approvals
Qatar; Kuwait; UAE; Bahrain	PAC-2 GEM-T; PAC-3 MSE	SAM	Lockheed Martin; RTX	US	FMS approvals
UAE	AIM-120C AMRAAM	ARH AAM	RTX	US	FMS approval
UAE	FS-LIDS	Point-defence Towed SAM System	RTX	US	FMS approval
UAE	Long-Range Discrimination Radar	Radar	Lockheed Martin	US	FMS approval
Qatar; several Gulf states	Cheongung-II (KM-SAM Block II)	MR SAM System	LIG Nex1	South Korea	Interest
Saudi Arabia	P-1 Sun	Interceptor UAV	SkyFall	Ukraine	Interest
Saudi Arabia	Sting	Interceptor UAV	Wild Hornets	Ukraine	Interest
Saudi Arabia	n.k.	Electronic Warfare system	Phantom Defense	Ukraine	Interest
Saudi Arabia	PAC-3 MSE	SAM	Mitsubishi Heavy Industries; Lockheed Martin	Japan; US	Interest†
UAE; Qatar; Kuwait	Octopus-100	Interceptor UAV	TAF Industries	Ukraine	Interest
UAE; several Gulf states	L-SAM	LR SAM System	LIG Nex1; Hanwha	South Korea	Interest
Several Gulf states	Terra A1	Interceptor UAV	Terra Drone; Amazing Drones	Japan; Ukraine	Interest
Several Gulf states	Magura	Uninhabited Surface Vessel	Uforce	Ukraine; UK	Interest
Several Gulf states	Mark I	Low-cost SR Missile	Frankenburg Technologies	UK	Interest
Several Gulf states	Guardian-1	Interceptor UAV	Powerus	US	Interest
Several Gulf states	Phalanx	Close-In Weapons System	RTX	US	Interest

**AAM** = Air-to-air missile; **ARH** = Active radar homing; **ASM** = Air-to-surface missile; **C2** = Command-and-control; **FMS** = Foreign military sales; **LR** = Long-range; **MR** = Medium-range; **SAM** = Surface-to-air missile; **SR** = Short-range; **UAV** = Uninhabited aerial vehicle  
\*Request to accelerate deliveries (signed in 2022). \*\*To be used in NASAMS. \*\*\*Request to accelerate deliveries (signed in 2024). †Manufactured under licence in Japan.

## Wrestling U17 Asian Championships: Iranians dominate Day 1 with six golds in seven GR events

### Sports Desk

Iranian boys stole the show on the opening day of the Wrestling U17 Asian Championships in Da Nang, Vietnam, grabbing six gold medals across seven Greco-Roman classes on Thursday. Ali-Akbar Akoo capped off an emphatic run for the Iranian squad by defeating Kazakhstan's Arystan Temergali 8-1 in the 110kg final. Armin Esmail had opened Iran's account earlier in the day with an 8-2 victory over Uzbekistan's Tokhirjon Karimov in the 45kg showdown. Another final showdown featuring Iranian and Uzbek wrestlers saw Ali Esmaili beat Javokhir Sharifboev 4-1 for the top prize in the 48kg event. Vahid Ashiri claimed the 55kg gold at the expense of Kyrgyzstan's Syimykh Askarov, who fell to a 3-1 loss against the Iranian. Amirreza Tahmasbpour was in a league of his own in the 60kg, securing three victories without conceding a single point – including two by superiority – en route to the final, before making quick work of Kyrgyzstan's Baiel Zhamalidinov with a 9-0 scoreline. Amirreza Mehri added Iran's fifth gold courtesy of a 3-1 win against South Korea's Jongyeon Na in the 92kg final. Ahmad Badraddin was the only Iranian to finish his campaign empty-handed on the first day of the competition, after his last-four 12-3 loss to eventual champion Kuanyshbek Zhagazhol of Kazakhstan was followed by a 7-0 defeat against Uzbekistan's Bunyod Hasanov in the 51kg bronze-medal contest. Thursday's triumphs, coupled with the results in Friday's morning session – which saw Esmail Zaherdoust advance to the 71kg final, and Hamed Dehqanzadeh (65kg) and Mahdi Gholamian (80kg) reach the bronze bouts in their respective events – were enough for the Iranian 10-man squad to secure the Greco-Roman team title even before the evening session at the Tien Son Sport Center. The Greco-Roman competition will be followed by the women's event, before the Iranian freestyle squad vies for a team title double for the country, starting with the 65kg, 71kg, and 80kg contests today.



Iranian Greco-Roman wrestler Amirreza Mehri celebrates after winning gold in the 92kg class at the U17 Asian Championships in Da Nang, Vietnam, on May 28, 2026.  
● AMIRREZA ALIASGHARI/UWW

## FIVB Men's Volleyball Nations League: Piazza names Iran's 16-man roster for Week 1



Iranian players and coaching staff are pictured during a training session in Tehran, Iran, on May 26, 2026.  
● PAYAM SANI/volleyball.ir

### Sports Desk

Italian head coach Roberto Piazza has confirmed Iran's 16-man squad for the opening week of the preliminary round of the upcoming Volleyball Nations League (VNL). Aiming to secure its first VNL Finals berth in four years, Iran will kick off its campaign with a daunting test against Brazil in Brasilia on June 10 – a rematch of last year's preliminary-round opener, which the South American powerhouse won in straight sets on home soil. Iran is set to face Brazil in a friendly double-header on June 2 and 4 as part of its week-long preparation at the Brazilian national team's training camp in Socorro. Star opposite Amin Esmailnejad will be a surprise absentee in the Brazilian capital, as he is among the four Iranians – alongside outside hitters Ehsan Daneshdoust, Esmail Mosafer, and Abdolreza Abdolhamidi – omitted by Piazza for Week 1. Bardia Sa'adat was also ruled out after suffering a finger injury in the buildup to the AVC Men's Champions League earlier

this month, with Foolad Sirjan's Ali Hajipour expected to be Piazza's first-choice opposite in the starting lineup. Tricky tests will come thick and fast in the Brazilian capital for Piazza's men, who will take on Bulgaria – a World Championship finalist last September – on June 11 before facing Argentina and Belgium later in the week at the Nilson Nelson Gymnasium. Iran also faced Argentina and Bulgaria in last year's edition, defeating the former 3-1 before concluding the preliminary phase with a straight-set victory over the European side. Iran will then travel to Orléans, France, for the second week of action, beginning with a mammoth clash against host and reigning Olympic champion France at the CO'Met Arena on June 24, followed by matches against the United States, Japan, and Cuba. The third and final week of the preliminaries will see Iran face Ukraine in Belgrade on July 15, with further matches against Germany, Slovenia, and Türkiye. The top eight teams in the 18-team standings will advance to the VNL Finals, which will begin

with the quarterfinals in Ningbo Beilun, China, on July 29. China is already guaranteed a place in the Finals as host nation. Iran enjoyed a respectable run in the 2025 preliminaries in Piazza's first year in charge. Having finished among the bottom three teams in the previous two editions, Iran staged a late surge to finish eighth with six wins from 12 matches. However, it ultimately missed out on the Finals after host China was granted a place in the last eight despite finishing second from bottom.

The following is Iran's 16-man squad:

**Setters:** Arshia Behnejad, Emran Kookjeili  
**Opposite spikers:** Ali Hajipour, Amirmohammad Golzadeh, Pouya Aryakhah  
**Outside hitters:** Morteza Sharifi, Pouria Hosseinkhazadeh, Mobin Nasri, Ali Haqqarast, Amirhossein Esfandiar  
**Middle blockers:** Yousef Kazemi, Seyyed Issa Nasseri, Mohammad Valizadeh, Armin Qelichniazi  
**Liberos:** Mohammadreza Hazratpour, Hossein Hajikalateh

## Iranian winger Sayyadmanesh to leave Westerlo as free agent

### Sports Desk

Allahyar Sayyadmanesh is set to embark on a new chapter in his career after the Iranian winger confirmed he is parting ways with Belgian top-flight side KVC Westerlo. "Another chapter of my life has come to an end – a chapter I'll always appreciate. Grateful for my 2.5

years at @kvcwesterlo," wrote the 24-year-old on Instagram on Thursday. Sayyadmanesh has also played for Turkish clubs Fenerbahçe and Istanbulspor, Ukraine's Zorya Lugansk, and English second-tier outfit Hull City since being introduced to European club football at the start of the 2019/20 season.

Having joined midway through the 2021/22 campaign, Sayyadmanesh bagged 14 goals and 13 assists in 84 appearances across all competitions for Westerlo. He found the net on seven occasions and provided teammates with five assists in 31 outings as Westerlo made it to the Jupiler Pro League Europe playoffs in the newly finished season, but ultimately missed out on a place in continental club competitions. Westerlo was keen on a contract extension for the versatile winger, who is capable of playing on both flanks, but negotiations in recent months fell through. Sayyadmanesh, who has one international goal in nine caps to his name, was hoping his impressive season would convince national team head coach Amir Qalenoee to pick him for the upcoming FIFA World Cup in North America, but he was ultimately overlooked for the provisional squad.



● TSI

## Aichi-Nagoya 2026:

## Alipour to chase third Asian Games gold as Iran confirms climbing duo

### Sports Desk

Iranian speed sensation Reza Alipour is set to vie for a third successive Asian Games gold medal after the country confirmed its sport climbing duo for Aichi-Nagoya 2026, which will kick off with the opening ceremony on September 19. Reza Zarei, chairman of the Iran Mountaineering & Sport Climbing Federation, made the announcement earlier this week, adding that Alipour will be joined by Sarina Ghaffari, who will compete in the women's boulder event. "Alipour was a gold medalist in the previous two editions in Jakarta and Hangzhou, and holds a significant advantage over other contenders in the country, which is why he was selected for the men's speed event at the Asian Games," Zarei said. A 2018 world champi-



● WORLD CLIMBING

on and a gold medalist at the World Games, the 32-year-old Alipour was nicknamed 'Persian Cheetah' and 'Usain Bolt of speed climbing' when footage of him scaling the 15-meter wall in 5.48 seconds – a then-world record – at the 2017 Climb-

ing World Cup went viral on social media. The Iranian, who also has an Asian Championships gold and six World Cup titles to his name, was unfortunate to miss out on a podium finish at the 2024 Paris Olympics after falling to American Sam Watson

in the bronze-medal race. Alipour, however, will have to improve his game if he is to succeed at the multi-sport event, after he endured a below-par run at the Asian Beach Games in Sanya, China, last month, suffering last-16 exits in both the individual and relay events. Meanwhile, Ghaffari, 20, will look to build on a decent run of performances over the past couple of years – most notably a gold-winning campaign at the 2024 Asian Youth Championships – in chasing Asian Games glory at the Nagoya International Exhibition Hall. "We wanted to have more climbers in the Iranian delegation, but under the technical committee's policies, the decision was made to stick with two competitors. I just hope they will both be in peak form by the time they head to the Asian Games," Zarei said.

# Archaeologists warn of growing damage to Tall-e Zahhak

## Iranica Desk

The ancient Zahhak Mound, known also as Tall-e Zahhak, in Fasa, Fars Province, is rapidly deteriorating. Farmland has been ploughed up to the very edge of the archaeological hill, landowners are reportedly removing soil from the site to enrich their own fields, and traces of illegal treasure hunters have been observed.

The renowned Tall-e Zahhak is considered one of Iran's most significant prehistoric and historic archaeological sites, holding exceptional value for historical and archaeological research. Archaeological evidence indicates that the site dates back to the third and fourth millennia BCE. During the Middle Elamite period, a ziggurat was constructed there, underscoring the site's importance in the study of ancient civilizations. In the Achaemenid era, the site became a major strategic and administrative center of the Persian Empire. Numerous archaeological investigations have identified Tall-e Zahhak as the location of the ancient city of Fasa during Achaemenid times, giving it a distinguished place in Iranian history, ISNA wrote.

The site once consisted of fortified walls and defensive moats and remained inhabited until the early Islamic centuries. However, after the development of the modern city of Fasa several kilometers away, the ancient settlement gradually declined and fell into



● ISNA

obscurity. Tall-e Zahhak is widely regarded as a national symbol and a defining element of Fasa's historical identity, deeply intertwined with the beliefs and traditions of local communities.

Agricultural expansion within the site's protected zone now poses a severe threat to the ancient monument. Farmers have allegedly been removing soil from the mound and adding it to their own lands, slowly eroding the nationally significant site. Deep ploughing around the mound has further endangered its archaeological layers. Farmland now surrounds the entire area and has become one of the greatest challenges facing the monument. Siavash Arya, a cultural heritage

expert, stated that landowners are using soil taken from Tall-e Zahhak in their fields and that the site has been subjected to repeated encroachments.

Another major concern is the daily passage of motorcyclists across the archaeological hill, effectively turning the ancient site into a motocross track. Experts say authorities must intervene immediately to prevent further damage. Uncontrolled and illegal construction within the protected perimeter of the site, ongoing for more than a decade in violation of cultural heritage regulations, has also become a serious threat to the preservation of the monument. Illegal excavations carried out by traffickers in historical artifacts

— driven by fantasies of hidden treasure — represent yet another danger to the site. Experts stress that such treasure myths have no archaeological basis.

In addition, sheep grazing and the accumulation of animal waste have created conditions favorable to rodents and other burrowing animals, which damage and disturb archaeological layers and destroy important site features. Experts are calling for grazing to be banned within the site and its buffer zone.

Researchers note that Tall-e Zahhak originally consisted of several surrounding mounds and covered a vast area. Unfortunately, most of the smaller satellite mounds have been completely destroyed

over recent decades due to soil extraction by farmers, with only small remnants surviving around the main mound. Portions of the ancient moat can still be seen among the surrounding agricultural lands. Experts warn that Tall-e Zahhak is now among the most endangered archaeological sites in both Fars Province and Iran as a whole. They caution that continued neglect could lead to a fate similar to that of other heavily damaged heritage sites, including Tappeh Hesar in Damghan.

Heritage advocates say the most urgent measure now required from Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts is the immediate fencing of the site to prevent further encroachment

and uncontrolled grazing. They also stress the need for the rapid legal demarcation of the site's boundaries and protected buffer zone so that future archaeological research may continue and the hidden dimensions of the ancient settlement can still be uncovered. Tall-e Zahhak is among the archaeological hills identified by the Belgian archaeologist Louis Vanden Berghe as one of the most important and valuable historical-period sites of the first millennium BCE in his work *Archaeology of Iran*. Evidence suggests that the deeper layers buried beneath the present plain date back to periods even earlier than the first millennium BCE.

An irrigation pipeline crossing directly over the archaeological mound further illustrates the site's ongoing deterioration.

During the Qajar era, Tall-e Zahhak once stood approximately 25 meters high and measured between 130 and 140 meters across. Today, however, due to destruction, erosion, and encroachment by landowners, the mound has been significantly reduced in size, with its height now measuring less than 15 meters.

Tall-e Zahhak was officially registered as a national heritage site on September 15, 1932, making it one of the earliest nationally registered historical monuments in Iran — an indication of its exceptional historical and archaeological significance.

## Kar Bafi tradition finds new life in Varzaneh

## Iranica Desk

In the mud-brick homes of Varzaneh, a desert town in Iran's central Isfahan Province, the centuries-old art of Kar Bafi — a traditional cotton weaving craft — is finding new life once again. Rooted in the cotton-growing lands of eastern Isfahan, Kar Bafi is far more than a textile technique. For generations, it has formed part of the identity and livelihood of local women, who transformed the white cotton harvested from nearby fields into handwoven cloths rich in beauty and tradition, according to IRNA. Among the veteran artisans preserving the craft is Fatemeh Heydari, an elderly weaver whose workshop remains active despite the hardships facing the industry. The shelves of her home are lined with traditional woven tablecloths, reflecting decades of effort to keep the art alive and prevent it from fading into obscurity.

Heydari, who began weaving at the age of 14, says the craft has shaped both her life and the spirit of her town. Even now, she continues her work with remarkable dedication despite growing concerns over the declining quality of raw materials and the disappearance of natural dyes.

"In the past, Kar Bafi relied on high-quality cotton fibers and natural dyes that ensured durability," she said. "But years of drought and the drying up of cotton fields have made it increasingly difficult to source good materials, affecting the quality of the fabrics."



She added that environmental changes have also altered the nature of dyes and fibers, undermining both the authenticity of the craft and customer confidence.

For Heydari, Kar Bafi is more than a profession. Having spent her childhood beside weaving pits and spinning bobbins, she considers the craft inseparable from her life. She has even set aside one of her handmade cloths for use as her own burial shroud.

Yet the future of Kar Bafi does not rest solely with aging masters. A younger generation of artisans is working to revive the craft through innovation, combining heritage craft with modern clothing and practical products.

Zahra Rahmati, a 40-year-old artisan and clothing producer, is among those helping reshape the future of Kar Bafi. After training at vocational centers in Varzaneh and apprenticing under veteran weavers, she established her own workshop



equipped with modern looms. "I didn't want to limit handwoven fabrics to towels or tablecloths," Rahmati said. "Now I use them in clothing, vests, trousers, bags, and other products." She believes combining tradition with creativity is essential for the craft's survival. While older generations learned entirely through hands-on apprenticeship, she says modern training has become increasingly theoretical.



● IRNA

and synthetic materials instead of the hand-prepared cotton once common in Varzaneh. Like many traditional crafts in Iran, Kar Bafi has suffered from shrinking markets and changing consumer habits. For years, production was largely limited to traditional tablecloths, reducing commercial demand. But artisans say the introduction of wearable and decorative products has begun attracting younger customers once again.

Still, economic pressures remain severe. "With people's purchasing power declining, Kar Bafi alone cannot provide a strong income," Rahmati said, adding that most sales occur at exhibitions or in areas frequented by tourists. "When foreign tourists visited the region, sales were much better because they appreciated natural handwoven fabrics."

Cultural heritage officials in Varzaneh say efforts are underway to preserve the craft through training programs and updated equipment designed to appeal to younger generations.

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Ahmad Shahbazi, a local cultural heritage expert, said Kar Bafi was once practiced in nearly every household in the region, producing fabrics used for clothing, bedding, bread cloths, and other household textiles.

However, the arrival of cheaper factory-made fabrics gradually pushed the local weaving art to the margins.

"Only a few active workshops remain today, and the number of veteran artisans has declined dramatically," Shahbazi said. "Some of the older masters have passed away in recent years, and the number of active practitioners can now be counted on one hand."

Despite these challenges, around 30 to 40 people have received basic Kar Bafi training in recent years, with roughly 15 to 20 continuing to work actively in the field.

Shahbazi believes the revival of the market is crucial for the survival of the craft.

"If there is a strong market for these products, production will increase and younger generations will have greater motivation to learn and continue the tradition," he said.

Located 105 kilometers south-east of Isfahan, Varzaneh has long been known for Kar Bafi, also called Sofreh Bafi, one of the simplest forms of cotton weaving in Iran. Traditionally, the fabrics were used for bread cloths, bridal bundles, white chadors, night coverings, and burial shrouds — preserving a living connection between the people of the desert town and their cultural heritage.

# Tehran-Ankara co-production 'Chemical' launches Iran shoot

## Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian director Reza Hossein Abadi has launched the second production phase of the feature film 'Chemical,' a joint Iranian-Turkish cinematic project that will begin filming in Iran, according to details released by the production team. The socially driven drama, jointly produced by Iranian producer Bita Jesmani and Turkish filmmaker and distributor Dogan, brings together actors from both

countries in a cross-border collaboration centered on the human consequences of narcotics and stimulant abuse, IRNA reported. The 90-minute film unfolds through two interconnected 45-minute narratives tied together by a psychologist investigating cases linked to the death of a child. Turkish actor Baris Bektas stars in the project, while Turkish singer and actor Emrah Erdogan Ipek appears in a guest role. Iranian performers Parasto

Gheytasi, Shahan Mohammadi and child actor Diako Farisabadi also feature in the cast. Producers said the second filming phase in Iran will additionally draw on Iranian theater actors. The project's executive planning and creative design are being jointly overseen by Jesmani and Dogan, indicating a growing wave of regional cultural cooperation between Iranian and Turkish filmmakers. Veteran Iranian composer

Behnam Abtahi is scoring the film. Hossein Abadi previously directed 'Doctor Hoffman,' a feature backed by actor Mohammad Reza Sharifinia and the Farabi Cinema Foundation. The film is nearing public release after missing screening plans at the latest Fajr Film Festival. Producers have yet to disclose full details of the project, which has already stirred curiosity across Iranian cinema circles.



# 'People's Child' from Iran heads to Czech film festival

## Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian feature film 'People's Child' has secured a spot at the 66th Zlin International Film Festival for Children and Youth in the Czech Republic, organizers and the film's producers said, marking another international outing for Iran's youth-centered cinema. Directed by Mahmoud Karimi and produced by Ali Ahmadi, the film will screen during the May 28 to June 3, edition of the long-running festival in the eastern Czech city of Zlin, a global showcase dedicated to children's and youth cinema, ILNA reported. Founded in 1961, the



Zlin festival has evolved into one of Europe's established platforms for feature films, shorts, animation and student productions aimed at younger audiences. Each year, it draws filmmakers, distributors and industry professionals from across the world. The selection marks

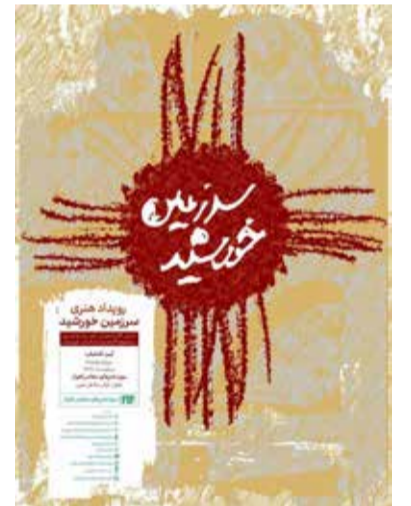
Karimi's first appearance at a major international festival with a debut feature, opening a new window onto contemporary Iranian storytelling and its emotionally grounded narratives. International distribution of the film is being handled by Soureh Cinema Organization.

# Ahvaz Museum of Contemporary Arts returns to cultural stage with 'Land of the Sun'

## Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian cultural authorities and Khuzestan provincial officials will launch the 'Land of the Sun' visual arts exhibition in Khorramshahr on May 30, marking the symbolic revival of the long-dormant Ahvaz Museum of Contemporary Arts through a showcase of modern artworks, rare wartime photographs and unseen cinematic archives. The exhibition, backed by Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Khuzestan Governorate and the Visual Arts Center, is being staged by the Neshan Institute as part of broader efforts to restore the museum to public life after nearly a decade of inactivity that had widened the gap between generations of artists in the southwestern province. Set against the scarred yet resilient landscape of Khuzestan, the event gathers selected works from the collections of the Ahvaz, Abadan and Khorramshahr contemporary art museums. The exhibition revolves

around the themes of Ramadan war, the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war, modern art and media. Among the highlights are previously unseen photographs from the Ramadan war frontlines and the liberation of Khorramshahr, alongside behind-the-scenes images from films by acclaimed Iranian director Ahmadreza Darvish. Some works will be unveiled publicly for the first time in Iran, organizers said. Hossein Barati, director general of Khuzestan's Culture and Islamic Guidance Department, described the reopening of the Ahvaz museum as a top institutional priority under a recent agreement between the culture minister and the provincial governor. "After years of closure, local and national authorities are determined to return this venue to the cultural circuit," Barati said. Naser Chenani, deputy director for cinematic and visual arts affairs at the provincial culture office, said the exhibition could emerge as one



of Khuzestan's most influential cultural events in recent years. Curated by a selection committee including graphic artist Farzad Mousavi and academics Maryam Hosseini and Azarnoush Gilani of Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, the exhibition will also run simultaneously in Abadan and Khorramshahr.

# Tajikistan signs deal to adopt Iranian health insurance model

## Social Desk

Iran and Tajikistan signed a new cooperation agreement to help roll out a national health insurance framework in Tajikistan, Iran's Health Insurance Organization chief Mohammad-Mehdi Nasehi said. The agreement, incorporated into the 18th document of the Iran-Tajikistan Joint Economic Cooperation Commission, deepens bilateral health-care ties by moving beyond broad institutional cooperation toward the operational design and implementation of core public health systems, IRNA reported. Under the deal, Iran will provide consulting, technical design and executive support for Tajikistan's basic health insurance network, refer-



on establishing a foundational health insurance structure in Tajikistan. The agreement builds on years of expanding healthcare collaboration between the two Persian-speaking nations. Iranian and Tajik officials first signed an insurance cooperation pact in 2008 during the seventh Joint Economic Commission meeting, including provisions for mandatory medical insurance services for citizens of both countries. Healthcare ties accelerated in recent years. Iranian medical centers had trained more than 242 Tajik physicians by October 2025, while the two sides agreed in March 2024 to pursue joint pharmaceutical production and expand exports of Iranian medical equipment to Tajikistan.

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**Second Announcement**

NATIONAL IRANIAN SOUTH OILFIELDS COMPANY  
AHVAZ-IRAN

## TENDER NO.: 08-21-0340015

The National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC) is seeking to procure the specified goods listed in the table below through a Qualitative Evaluation Call for conducting a public tender via the Government Electronic Procurement System (SETAD). All stages of the tender process including the receipt of tender documents, submission of bidders' proposals, and the opening of bid envelopes, shall be carried out exclusively through the Government Electronic Procurement System (SETAD) portal at [www.setadiran.ir](http://www.setadiran.ir). Bidders who have not previously registered must complete the registration process on the aforementioned portal and obtain an Electronic Signature certificate to participate in the tender.

Item	Material Description	Quantity
1	CASING, NON API, GRADE P-110SS, SEAMLESS, "N.VAM", THD OR EQUIVALENT, RANGE 3 (MAX LENGTH: 40.5 FT), PSL: 3, AS PER API SCT / ISO11960 NACE MR0175, MARKING: STENCIL PRINTING IN ACCORDANCE WITH API SCT MAX. H.R.C.:29, H2S (PPM): 21600, CO2 (PPM): 49000, TEMPERATURE: 225 F, SIZE, WEIGHT, DRIFT AS SPECIFIED; REF. NISOC/ NIOC APPROVED STANDARD MANUFACTURES COLLAPSE PRESSURE: 13020 PSI, BURST PRESSUR: 13700 PSI, 7 IN., 35 PPF, DRIFT: 5.879 IN.	4,000 LE
2	COUPLING CASING, API GRADE P-110SS OR ALL WEIGHTS IN ACCORDANCE WITH API SCT/ISO11960, TO BE ELECTRO PLATED SIZE & THREAD AS SPECIFIED, 7 IN., NEW VAM, DRIFT: 5.875 IN.	150 NO

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders are requested to send their "Intention To Participate" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no. 1, available at: [www.setadiran.ir](http://www.setadiran.ir), not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the tender will be disregarded. The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 56,359/62 EURO or 90,232,646,256 RIAL, in favor of NISOC.

ONLY ACCEPTABLE DELIVERY TERM IS CFR, BANDAR IMAM KHOMEINI, IRAN PAYMENT TERM IS C.A.D INCLUDING 25% ADVANCE PAYMENT, SUBSEQUENT TO NISOC'S MATERIAL APPROVAL

**FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT**  
Bldg. No. 104, Material Procurement Management Complex,  
Kouy-e-Fadaeian Islam (New Site), Ahvaz, Iran  
Tel. No.: 061 341 23589 Fax No.: 061 34457437

**PUBLIC RELATIONS**

[www.shana.ir](http://www.shana.ir)   [www.nisoc.ir](http://www.nisoc.ir)   <http://iets.mporg.ir>   [www.setadiran.ir](http://www.setadiran.ir)