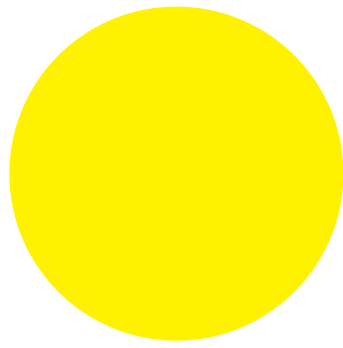


Tehran, Beijing eye joint restoration of war-damaged heritage sites



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Iran's midfielder #08 Mohammad Mohebbi scores his team's second goal past New Zealand's goalkeeper #01 Max Crocombe during the 2026 World Cup Group G football match at Los Angeles Stadium in Inglewood, the United States on June 15, 2026.

AFP

What international legal guarantees would an Iran-US memo carry?



By Hossein Sadat Meidani
Professor of International Relations

OPINION

Iran and the United States, with mediation from Pakistan, Qatar and several other countries, have reached a memorandum that outlines a framework for ending the current hostilities and steering future diplomatic talks toward a comprehensive agreement. The document is scheduled to be signed in Geneva on June 19.

From an international law perspective, the most important question is the legal nature of this document. Separate from any analysis of the specific obligations and responsibilities that may arise for each side, which itself requires a dedicated legal examination, several observations can be made about the character of the memo.

Distinguishing between non-binding document and its legal effects

Contemporary international law draws a clear distinction between the non-binding nature of an international document and its legal consequences. Labeling a document as political or non-binding does not automatically mean it is devoid of international legal effects for the parties involved.

The issue has become significant enough that, since 2023, the United Nations International Law Commission has placed the study of non-binding agreements and their implications on its agenda. Even when an international understanding is formally non-binding, it may still generate legal consequences for the parties that endorse it.

Age of 'treaty fatigue'

As described by a United Nations deputy secretary-general, the current era can be characterized as an age of "treaty fatigue." Over the past two decades, states have increasingly moved away from rigid treaty-making processes and toward non-binding instruments such as memorandums of understanding. These arrangements allow governments to reach politically flexible agreements on sensitive issues without taking on strict legal obligations or navigating lengthy domestic ratification procedures. The current US administration has largely embraced this approach. Donald Trump himself has generally spoken of "deals" rather than "treaties."

Intent, not labels, determines legal character

Distinguishing a treaty, meaning a legally binding agreement, from a non-binding

instrument has long been one of international law's most persistent challenges. It is widely accepted that the title of a document is not decisive. What matters instead is the parties' intention and their subsequent conduct.

The International Court of Justice has repeatedly affirmed this principle, including in its 2025 ruling in the Gabon-Equatorial Guinea dispute and earlier cases such as the Qatar-Bahrain maritime and territorial dispute. The court has emphasized that the determining factor is "not form or terminology but the genuine 'intention of the parties,' while recent jurisprudence has adopted a more restrictive approach. The default assumption is that a document is not a treaty unless evidence demonstrates that the parties intended to create legal obligations. Based on available evidence, official positions and published reports, the recent Iran-US understanding does not appear to reflect such legal intent and therefore is unlikely to qualify as a treaty. However, the parties' future conduct could still shape both its legal nature and the scope of its effects. Planned signing ceremonies and official statements will be particularly important in this regard.

Challenge of durability in international documents

A longstanding assumption holds that

turning an agreement into a treaty guarantees its durability and implementation. Experience suggests otherwise. Recent history, particularly Trump's unilateral withdrawal from almost 70 to 80 international agreements, most of them formal and legally binding treaties, has shown that legal form alone offers little protection against the political choices of major powers. International law itself has often proved limited in addressing this reality.

State sovereignty encompasses freedom in treaty relations, and some scholars argue that withdrawal from treaties remains permissible unless explicitly prohibited. The history of international relations also shows that preserving and guaranteeing the implementation of agreements concluded with the United States is exceptionally difficult. Even highly institutionalized bodies such as the World Trade Organization and the United Nations, both built upon strict legal frameworks, have struggled over time to develop effective enforcement mechanisms capable of restraining norm-defying US behavior. The challenge is even more pronounced in Iran-US relations, which rest on deep distrust, a distrust further aggravated by the recent US aggression and crimes against the Iranian people. These reali-

ties cannot be ignored.

Rethinking concept of guarantees in international affairs

One objective reality must be acknowledged: in international relations, the notion of a guarantee, at least in the mechanical and absolute sense often invoked in domestic debates, simply does not exist.

In the absence of a supreme authority capable of enforcing international law, the most effective guarantee is the creation of reciprocal legal or political mechanisms built around the accepted principle of "self-help" in response to violations. The goal is to ensure that the cost of breaching commitments outweighs any potential benefit.

The challenge of securing compliance in agreements with the United States therefore cannot be addressed through legal instruments alone. Nor is this challenge unique to Iran. Countries around the world have faced it, as illustrated by US trade tariff policies over the past two years.

Calibrating expectations of international law

Curbing expectations about what international law can realistically achieve is essential for Iran's foreign relations.

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Qalibaf, Vance to attend Switzerland signing of Iran-US peace memo

Araghchi: Talks on final deal likely to begin on Friday

International Desk

Iranian deputy foreign minister said on Tuesday that top negotiator Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf and US Vice President JD Vance will attend the formal signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Switzerland on Friday to end a recent US-Israeli aggression against Iran.

Both countries announced the agreement on Monday after a marathon of negotiations mediated by Pakistan, which will be followed by 60-day negotiations on Iran's nuclear issue and sanctions imposed on the Islamic Republic.

Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi said on the sidelines of a meeting with foreign diplomats based in Tehran that the second phase of the two-stage process will begin

immediately after the signing of the memorandum on Friday. According to the Swiss Foreign Ministry, the signing ceremony will be held at Switzerland's mountainside Bürgenstock resort.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who addressed the same meeting on Tuesday, also said a new round of negotiations between Tehran and Washington to reach a final agreement will likely begin on Friday.

"In the final agreement, decisions will be made on the nuclear issues and the lifting of sanctions."

Details of MoU

Takht-Ravanchi noted that the MoU addresses war reparations, the release of Iran's frozen assets, and an end to hostilities across the region, in-



Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi (R) and his deputy Majid Takht-Ravanchi attend a meeting with ambassadors and heads of foreign diplomatic missions and international organizations based in Tehran, Iran on June 16, 2026.

● ISNA

aged."

He also emphasized that the memorandum addresses Tehran's long-standing demand for access to its frozen assets and the lifting of restrictions affecting maritime trade routes, referring to an illegal naval blockade imposed by the US on Iran's southern ports and its vessels since the beginning of the recent aggression against Iran on February.

Announcing the agreement in a post on social media on the early hours of Monday, US President Donald Trump said the

Strait of Hormuz, a major shipping route for global oil and gas supplies that Iran has effectively shut down for months, would open on Friday, and that he had ordered the end of the US blockade of Iranian ports.

The memorandum of understanding also includes a \$300bn fund to help rebuild Iran.

Vance on Monday said Iran could have access to a \$300 billion reconstruction fund under its peace agreement with the US if Tehran upholds its obligations outlined in the deal.

When asked about the fund by CBS News's Ed O'Keefe during a Monday morning interview, Vance said, "Well, Ed, that's the sort of thing they could have access to, funded by the [Persian] Gulf Coast Coalition, so long as they honor their end of the obligation."

cluding in Lebanon. The Iranian diplomat said that reconstruction is among the

key issues covered by the document, stressing that a "plan for reconstruction has been envis-

Tehran says US naval blockade on Iranian ports 'lifted'

International Desk

Iranian officials said on Tuesday that a naval blockade imposed by the United States on Iran's ports have been removed ahead of the formal signing of a peace understanding between Tehran and Washington in Switzerland on Friday. Senior member of the Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Alaeddin Boroujerdi said that several Iranian ships have already broken through the US naval blockade which has been in place since April 13.

The US imposed the blockade on Iranian ports after Iran closed the strategic Strait of Hormuz in response to the US-Israeli aggression against Iran in February 28. The closure of the waterway caused the surge in energy prices



Cargo ships are seen near the Strait of Hormuz in the Persian Gulf on March 11, 2026.

● REUTERS

across the world.

In an interview with ISNA, Boroujerdi said several Iranian vessels have successfully navigated through the blockade zone, effectively allowing the country to resume its export operations, which marks the first tangible benefit secured by Iran under the agreement.

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Majid Takht-Ravanchi also said on Tuesday that the two-month US naval blockade on Iranian ports have been

lifted.

"The lifting of the blockade was something we had emphasized from the outset. It has now begun, and the blockade has been lifted prior to the formal signing" scheduled for Friday, said Takht-Ravanchi, according to the government's website.

Earlier on the day, Iran's state television reported the resumption of shipping by Iranian vessels in the strait.

At least three Iranian oil tankers and two cargo

ships carrying essential goods have successfully broken through the US naval blockade.

The vessels, which had been stranded for months amid the illegal American blockade against Iranian shipping, sailed through international waters unimpeded, according to informed maritime sources speaking exclusively to Press TV.

It came less than 24 hours after the finalized memorandum of understanding (MoU) mediated by Pakistan and Qatar mandated an immediate end to the illegal US naval blockade against Iran as part of a wider cessation of hostilities on all fronts.

Army chief vows 'overwhelming fury' against enemy miscalculation



Amir Hatami
● IRNA

The chief commander of the Iranian Army said the enemy failed to achieve any of its goals during two wars, warning that any miscalculation will be met with the Iranian Armed Forces' overwhelming fury.

Major General Amir Hatami made the remarks during a ceremony in Tehran on Tuesday, a day after Iran and the United States announced they had finalized a tentative agreement to end the war that began in late February, Press TV reported. "The enemy stated in its strategic objectives that it wanted to force Iran to surrender, destroy the Islamic Republic, and shamelessly spoke of changing Iran's map," Hatami said. "Today, none of these objectives have been achieved." The United States and Israel launched a war of aggression against Iran on February 28. They assassinated Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali

Khamenei and struck nuclear facilities, schools and hospitals.

Iran responded with at least 100 waves of decisive retaliatory strikes under Operation True Promise 4.

General Hatami pointed to past aggressions, saying that during the 12-day war in June 2025 and the recent US-Israeli aggression, the enemy pleaded for a ceasefire.

"The Iranian nation has not only refused to surrender, but you saw in the case of Lebanon that Iran's will was imposed on the enemy," he stated.

He also dismissed enemy claims of military victory as false, highlighting the Iranian Navy's powerful defense along 600 kilometers of the Sea of Oman. He noted that enemy naval vessels that entered Iranian waters were targeted by Army and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps.

End of war hinges on Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon: FM

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Tuesday that any new Israeli attacks on Lebanon or continued occupation of the recently-seized territories in the country would constitute a violation of a peace agreement that is scheduled to be signed between Iran and the US on Friday.

Speaking at a meeting with foreign diplomats based in Tehran on Tuesday, Araghchi identified the most important provision of the memorandum as declaration of an immediate and permanent end to the war across all fronts, including Lebanon.

The foreign minister also emphasized that the end of the war also requires an end to the Israeli presence in the territories that the regime has occupied since escalating its aggression against Lebanon.



"The end of the war includes the end of occupation. Without the withdrawal of Israeli forces from territories they occupied during this war, the war will have not been fully brought to an end," he said.

The conflict between Israel and Lebanon's resistance movement Hezbollah began in March after the Lebanese group launched military operations against the Israeli regime in response to the regime's aggression against Iran.

The war has claimed at least 3,700 lives since March 2, according to the latest figures released by Lebanon's Health Ministry.

Hezbollah's chief Sheikh Naim Qassem in a message to Iranian Parliament speaker and top negotiator Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, thanked him for helping stop the "Israeli-American aggression" on Lebanon.

Naim Qassem expressed "profound gratitude" for Iran's efforts "to compel the Israeli entity to an immediate and permanent cessation of military operations on all fronts, including in Lebanon."

Sheikh Qassem added, "We have always said that Iran has given Hezbollah, the resistance and the Lebanese people everything, and has taken nothing in return. It has supported us in our choices and strengthened us to liberate our land."



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Rudshur Power Plant starts up largest high-efficiency steam unit

Economy Desk

Iran's Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi inaugurated the 345-megawatt steam unit at Rudshur Power Plant on Tuesday, marking the largest high-efficiency steam unit in the country with an investment volume of 275 million euros.

The unit, a Class F combined-cycle facility, was launched in a virtual ceremony attended by the minister, according to ISNA.

Mohsen E'temadi, managing director of Iran's Thermal Power Plant Holding Company, said the steam unit project was initiated to increase electricity generation, meet rising energy demand in central Iran – particularly in Tehran Province – and boost the efficiency of existing gas-fired units by converting them to combined-cycle operations.

The electricity demand is expected to rise by more than 5% this year, after Iran's peak electricity consumption hovered around 79,000 megawatts last summer.

"For the first time in the country, this project features a 3-3-1 configuration, connecting three gas turbines, three heat-recovery boilers, and one steam turbine," E'temadi said.

He added that the final capacity of the Rudshur Power Plant has now reached 1,134 MW with the completion of the project. "By

capturing exhaust heat from the gas units and directing it to the steam section equipment, electricity is generated without additional fuel consumption," he said, noting that the steam unit's annual output equates to savings of 700 million cubic meters of fuel. "The plant's efficiency will rise to approximately 57 percent with the addition of this steam unit," E'temadi said. "Given that this facility is located near Tehran and Markazi provinces – key energy consumption hubs – the new unit will play a crucial role in maintaining grid stability and improving voltage levels in the region."

Nominal power capacity tops 100,315 MW

Addressing the ceremony, Aliabadi said, "with the new capacity connected to the national grid, Iran's nominal power generation capacity has surpassed 100,315 MW," a threshold that he said will continue to rise through the end of the current administration (July 2028).

He emphasized that the additional capacity was achieved without burning extra fuel. "The 345-MW increase in nominal capacity was realized solely through steam generated by cooling boilers at the plant," he said. He also noted that water consumption has been minimized through modern technologies, achieving significant



savings.

The energy minister highlighted ongoing expansion of transmission and distribution networks alongside new generation projects. "We are commissioning projects across various capacities to match generation with grid demands and avoid generation bottlenecks," he said, adding that further capacity targets have been set and are expected to be met by the end of the administration.

Grid connectivity with neighbors

Aliabadi also addressed plans for electrical interconnections with neighboring countries, stating

that such links would be mutually beneficial. "We are currently connected to Pakistan, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, and Iraq," he said. "We are also in negotiations with Qatar." He recalled that during wartime, Iran helped Iraq restore its grid after a nationwide blackout.

The minister also referenced the impact of hostilities on Iran's power infrastructure, reiterating that approximately 4,200 MW of industrial capacity was affected. "Repairs are underway, and part of that capacity has already been restored," he said. Damage was sustained to parts of the distribution network, power pylons, substations, transformers, and

Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi inaugurates the 345-MW steam unit at Rudshur Power Plant in Markazi Province during a virtual ceremony on June 16, 2026. moe.gov.ir

the Mobarakeh Steel, Fajr, and Bandar Abbas power plants, he added.

"Despite these losses, we have managed the situation effectively and have navigated through without imposing widespread restrictions," Aliabadi said.

A US-Israeli coalition launched a 40-day military campaign in late February, which targeted much of the country's infrastructure and civilian sectors.

Pezeshkian unveils 2,209 projects to enhance agricultural output



President Masoud Pezeshkian orders the inauguration of 2,209 agricultural projects across Iran on June 15, 2026. president.ir

Economy Desk

As many as 2,209 projects in the agricultural sector were inaugurated by President Masoud Pezeshkian via video link across the country on Monday night to mark the Agricultural Jihad Week (starting on mid-June).

The projects, covering water and soil management, livestock and poultry, agricultural processing and complementary industries, horticulture, farming and fisheries, were launched with total investment of more than 30 trillion rials (\$1.93 billion).

The projects were implemented nationwide, including in the provinces of Khuzestan, Kerman, Isfahan, Khorasan Razavi, Hormozgan, Ardebil and West Azarbaijan, which accounted for the largest number of projects, president.ir reported.

According to a report, 79% of the investment was financed by private sector investors and agricultural sector operators.

Agriculture Minister Gholamreza Nouri Qezelgeh said at the inauguration ceremony that the initiatives will provide direct employment for more than 42,000 people and indirect employment for about 30,000 people.

He said that the facilities will play an important role in economic development and increasing production capacity in the agricultural sector.

Speaking at the virtual inauguration ceremony for the agricultural projects, Pezeshkian commemorated Agricultural Jihad Week and stressed the need for synergy among farmers, industrialists, experts and innovators.

"We must, through the cooperation and participation of all those active in this field, chart a new horizon for the country's growth, prosperity, dynamism and development," he said.

Agriculture Week, observed annually in mid-June, marks the anniversary of the founding of the Jihad-e Sazandegi (Construction Jihad) Organization by a decree from the late founder of the Islamic Republic on June 17, 1979. The organization was later merged with the Ministry of Agriculture.

Iran's benchmark stock index tops record 5 million points



Economy Desk

Iran's benchmark stock index surged past the 5-million-point level for the first time on Tuesday, closing at 5,100,000 points after gaining 119,898 units, as the market extended its recovery following a wartime trading halt, state-run IRNA reported. The main Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE) index gained 119,898 points to close at 5.1 million points, while the equal-weight index rose 15,000 points to 1.351 million, according to state media.

The total value of the TSE entered the 15,000 trillion-toman range (about \$96.5 billion), while daily turnover reached 254.9 trillion toman (\$1.64 billion). Retail trading exceeded 40 trillion toman (\$257 million).

Top performers included Per-

sian Gulf Petrochemical (FARS) and Mobarakeh Steel (FMLY), which contributed 38,000 and 22,000 points to the benchmark index's rise, respectively.

Among the most actively traded stocks, Bank Mellat (WEBMELAT) saw 36 billion shares, Iran Khodro (IKCO) traded 26 billion shares, and SAIPA (KHSAAPA) recorded 10 billion shares.

On the self-regulatory Iran Fara Bourse, index also climbed 258 points to 38,420.

The gains followed months during which the Tehran bourse came under heavy pressure from wartime conditions, political uncertainty and a prolonged trading halt that led many investors to adopt a cautious stance. Trading on the TSE resumed on May 19 after an 80-day suspension, with Iranian equities ending the session stronger than expected and showing early signs of stability following the prolonged halt caused by the war.

The stock market had been closed since February 28 following US and Israeli aggression on Iran.

'Action plan' underway to boost postwar gas production: Minister

Economy Desk

An "action plan" has been launched to ramp up natural gas extraction from onshore fields, Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad said as the country faces a growing gas shortage exacerbated by damage sustained during the recent war. Paknejad said that alongside ongoing operations at South Pars, the world's largest gas field, which Iran shares with Qatar in the Persian Gulf, an emergency program to boost output from onshore gas fields had been drawn up and entered the implementation stage, IRNA reported on Tuesday.

The initiative covers all fields operated by the Iranian Central Oil Fields Company (ICOFC), Iran's second-largest natural gas extractor after state-run Pars Oil and Gas Company, which develops the giant South Pars field.

"Based on the plan, we will use all available capacities to increase gas production, including the collection of associated petroleum gas (APG), and all ICOFC fields will



see higher output," Paknejad said.

APG or flare gas is a by-product in oil and gas facilities that is burned via flare stacks due to a lack of required installations.

The ICOFC develops 87 oil and gas fields in 18 provinces and contributes about 25% of Iran's total natural gas production.

South Pars is the backbone of Iran's energy system, supplying around 70% of the country's gas needs. However, the field's processing infrastructure was heavily affected during a 40-day war waged by the United States and Israel against Iran in late February.

In mid-March, an Israeli air strike damaged gas processing facilities in the southern port of Asaluyeh, knocking two refineries out of opera-

tion and destroying fuel storage tanks.

A lawmaker said last month that the raid caused about \$4 billion in damage to facilities in Asaluyeh.

Before the attack, Iran was extracting more than 1.1 billion cubic meters of gas per day from its fields, including 730 million cubic meters (mcm) per day from South Pars.

Paknejad said earlier in June that the strike wiped out 230 mcm per day of gas processing capacity, of which 30 mcm had been restored over the past two months.

The remaining 200 mcm of lost processing capacity accounts for nearly 22% of Iran's total daily gas production capacity of about 900 mcm per day. The action plan appears aimed at making up for part of the mismatch between gas production and consumption before winter arrives, when demand typically surges.

Iran had already been facing a daily gas shortfall of 300 mcm per day before the damage to the Asaluyeh facilities.

What international legal ...

Placing demands on the country's diplomatic apparatus that international law itself cannot fulfill does little to advance Iran's national interests and may ultimately complicate efforts to secure its rights.

Global trends suggest that international law and the broader international order are increas-

ingly moving toward more flexible, power-based instruments, including non-binding political agreements and evolving customary law. In some circumstances, these tools may reflect actual power balances more accurately than traditional legal agreements such as treaties, which helps explain why major powers increasingly favor them.

For smaller countries, however, this trend may create long-term challenges, even if it has become an undeniable reality. Taken together, the current framework of understanding, regardless of its formal legal status, provides a practical foundation and a roadmap for any future agreement. The larger challenge remains implementation, particularly

on the US side. The American record of inconsistent compliance with international commitments continues to stand as the greatest obstacle facing Iran, and the answer cannot be purely diplomatic or purely legal. Most likely, as with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, both sides will eventually seek to strengthen the international

legal standing of a final agreement through mechanisms such as United Nations Security Council resolutions. Even then, one lesson should not be forgotten: the old tale of 'Mouse and Cat' by Iranian satirist and poet Ubayd Zakani about "belling the cat" remains relevant. Placing restraints on a criminal cat is far easier said than done.

Human mind as battlefield in war of humans

By Alireza Zarei
Expert on regional affairs

OPINION

For decades, the concept of war in global strategic discourse was defined by tanks, missiles, naval vessels, and air power. Military power meant the capacity for physical destruction, and superiority on the battlefield was measured by territorial occupation or the destruction of infrastructure. However, today's world has entered a phase in which the human mind has become the most important battlefield.

In the ongoing confrontation between Iran and the West, what has gained paramount importance is the ability to manage perception, control narratives, and influence the psychological calculations of the opposing side. This is precisely what is defined today in security literature as "cognitive warfare". Cognitive warfare is a war for dominance over minds — a battle whose objective is to alter societal perceptions, erode political will, and influence decision-making processes.

In such an environment, artificial intelligence (AI) is no longer merely an economic or industrial technology but has become part of the infrastructure of national power. Algorithms can now analyze public opinion, predict user behavior, and even influence collective emotions on a massive scale. For this reason, geopolitical competition among powers has gradually shifted from the classical military domain to the realm of data, perception, and digital governance.

Iran and the logic of cognitive deterrence

One of the most significant developments in recent years has been Iran's effort to utilize cognitive warfare tools alongside military deterrence. Iran has understood well that in confronting the West's hardware superiority, sole reliance on classical military tools will



TANIA YAKUNOVA/CHATHAM HOUSE

not suffice. Consequently, managing public perception and increasing the psychological and political costs of war have become part of Iran's deterrence strategy.

This strategy is not limited to media operations but encompasses a set of communicative, cyber, cognitive, and technological tools. The targeted dissemination of narratives, the use of social media, information warfare, and even leveraging artificial intelligence capabilities to analyze public opinion are all comprehensible within this framework.

During recent crises, Iran has sought to convey the message that any extensive confrontation would not be merely a limited military operation but could transform into a widespread psychological, economic, and political crisis for the West. This issue gains particular significance in Western societies, where public opinion directly influences decision-making processes.

The reality is that Western governments are more concerned than ever about their cognitive vulner-

abilities. The proliferation of fake news, digital infiltration operations, and information manipulation has meant that cybersecurity is no longer limited to protecting infrastructure but has expanded to encompass the protection of social cohesion and public trust.

AI and the future of security governance

The entry of artificial intelligence into the security domain has also altered the nature of threats. If in the past, the primary threat was limited to direct military attack, today, data manipulation, public opinion engineering, and cognitive operations can be as destructive as a military assault.

Recent studies at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute indicate that Europe and the United States are seeking to develop new frameworks for cyber governance and managing software vulnerabilities. The reason for this is growing concern about asymmetric wars in which state and non-state actors can use digital tools to create instability.

In this context, artificial intelligence has become a dual-use tool. On one hand, it can be employed to strengthen cybersecurity and analyze threats; on the other hand, it can become an instrument for generating extensive psychological operations. Advanced algorithms can now produce content that makes distinguishing reality from fabrication difficult, and this very issue has confronted the concept of truth in the public sphere with a crisis.

This transformation is not merely a technical matter but a geopolitical one. A country that can gain mastery over data infrastructure, communication platforms, and artificial intelligence algorithms will, in practice, possess a portion of future global power.

Redefining Western doctrine against asymmetric threats

The West has now reached the conclusion that emerging threats cannot be contained solely through traditional tools. For this reason, the security doctrines of

the United States and Europe are being redefined. The increasing focus on cybersecurity, countering cognitive infiltration operations, and regulating artificial intelligence are all part of this process. Simultaneously, this transformation has created an important contradiction. Western governments, which have always championed freedom of information and an open internet, are now seeking to control information flows and regulate digital space more than ever before. This issue demonstrates the extent to which cognitive warfare has been able to transform traditional security equations. In such an environment, Iran must strive to define itself not merely as a military actor but also as a power capable of generating costs in the cognitive and perceptual domains. This very matter has shaped part of the new deterrence equation in the region.

Today's world has entered a phase in which wars are shaped in human minds before they are decided on the battlefield. Power is no longer dependent solely on the number of missiles and fighter jets but has also become dependent on the ability to manage perception, control narratives, and govern data.

In the confrontation between Iran and the West, cognitive warfare has become one of the most important dimensions of strategic competition. Iran seeks to use perceptual and cognitive tools to increase the political and psychological costs of war for the West, while the West is redefining its security and cyber structures to counter these emerging threats. This trend indicates that future wars will be, more than ever before, invisible, complex, and data-driven — a war in which the human mind may remain the most important battlefield.

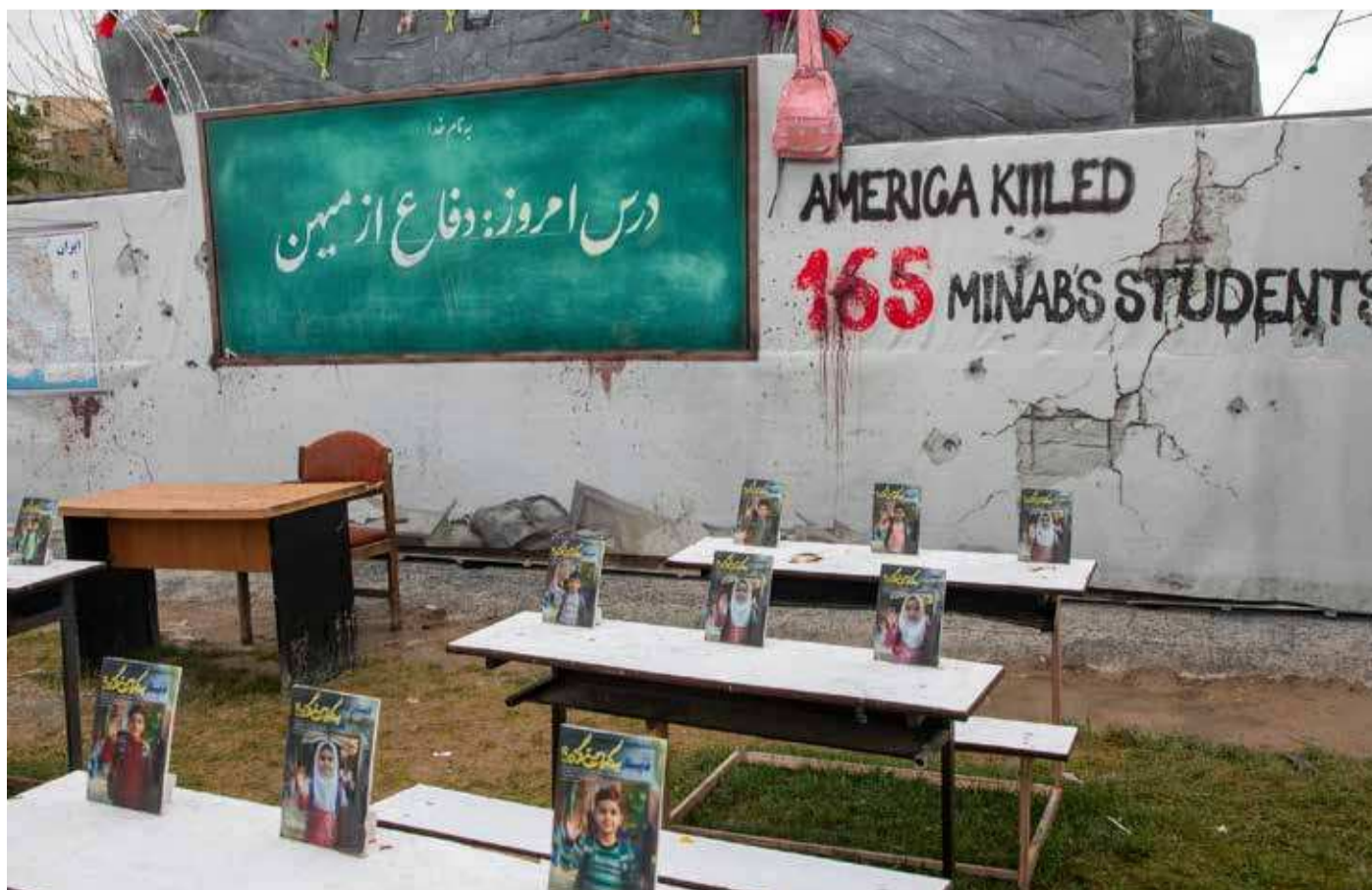
The article was first published by the Strategic Council for Foreign Relations.



A memorial for the victims of the US-Israeli bombing of the Shajareh Tayyebeh primary school is constructed in Tehran, Iran, with AI-generated images of the victims displayed on the tables.
MAJID SAEEDI/GETTY IMAGES



The reality is that Western governments are more concerned than ever about their cognitive vulnerabilities. The proliferation of fake news, digital infiltration operations, and information manipulation has meant that cybersecurity is no longer limited to protecting infrastructure but has expanded to encompass the protection of social cohesion and public trust.



Political consequences of Iran war

By William A. Galston
Senior fellow at Brookings

OPINION

If Robert Kagan and other early opponents of the war in Iran are right, the conflict will end in defeat for the United States, an outcome that will irreversibly weaken America's global standing and will "set off a chain reaction around the world as friends and foes alike adjust to America's failure". Even when a war begins with popular support, as many do, failing to achieve its key objectives can affect public sentiment in ways that constrain the ability of leaders to undertake future military action. And when wars are undertaken without initial public support, as the latest conflict with Iran was, the public reaction against those who started and supported it can be harsh.

It is too early to predict the outcome of the war with certainty, but the United States is farther away from achieving its objectives than the Trump administration has been willing to admit. Although the president and senior officials insist that Iran's military has been destroyed, classified intelligence assessments have concluded that Iran can still field about 75% of its mobile launchers and retains about 70% of its prewar missile stockpile. The evidence suggests that Iran has rebuilt access to 30 of its 33 missile sites along the Strait of Hormuz, which would make it dangerous for the US Navy to escort cargo vessels through the strait. If the assessment is correct, the Iranians have been able to reopen most of their underground storage facilities and repair at least some damaged missiles.

Another report produced for the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff by the Joint Chiefs' intelligence directorate found that the war with Iran is working to China's advantage across military, economic, and diplomatic domains. President Xi Jinping's confident conduct during President Donald Trump's recent visit to Beijing is consistent with the Pentagon's assessment.

Kagan's analysis focuses on the international consequences of failure in Iran, but its effects are likely to ripple through America's internal affairs as well. Military setbacks tend to reduce public confidence, not only in the administrations that preside over them, but in government as a whole. The public mood darkens, and its confidence in the future declines.

Wars that end in defeat — Vietnam and Afghanistan, for example — diminish public support for military action abroad, as do wars, such as America's long engagement in Iraq, whose costs are seen as exceeding its benefits, even if the outcome is more ambiguous. When Trump began his presidential campaign in 2015 by denouncing the wars in the Middle East as stupid, many observers thought that Republican primary voters would turn against him. But he had read the mood of the voters more accurately than commentators trapped in the Reagan-era assumption that Republicans were uniformly hawkish. Failed wars have consequences that endure longer than the presidents who start them.

The current state of US public opinion

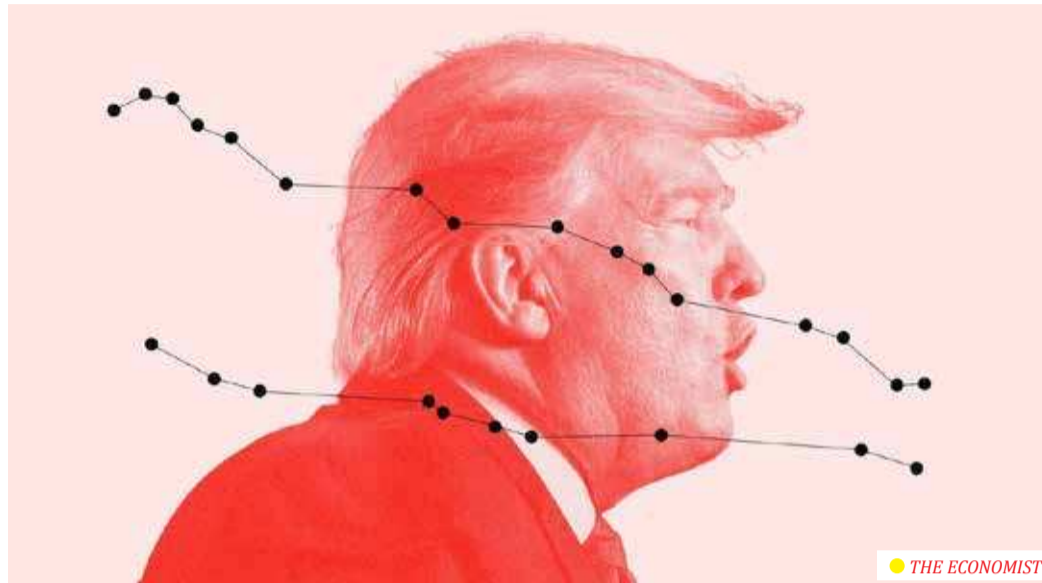
Most wars in modern American history have begun with broad

public support, which fades if a war continues over an extended period without yielding clear advantages or a successful outcome. By contrast, the war with Iran was unpopular even before it began, and it has become steadily more unpopular over time. Polls conducted soon after the war began found that by an average of 48% to 43%, a plurality of Americans opposed the war. Polls conducted in May showed disapproval rising sharply to an average of 58%, compared to just 38% who supported the war.

The reasons for the public's initial negative reaction are clear. Among them: only 25% bought the Trump administration's claim that Iran represented an imminent threat to the United States, and 56% believed that the administration should have sought congressional approval before initiating hostilities.

By April, the public's reservations about the war had broadened. More than six in 10 Americans — including nearly all Democrats and 72% of independents — had concluded that Trump did not have a clear plan for the conflict, and two-thirds said that the administration had failed to explain the war's goals. Asked about specific goals, overwhelming majorities said that the United States had failed to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and permanently stop Iran's nuclear programs.

A Chicago Council on Global Affairs survey conducted in early May provided the broadest portrait of public sentiment so far. By then, Americans had concluded that the impact of the war was negative for the US cost of living (86%), international relations (72%), overseas reputation (72%), and national security (65%). Majorities of Americans thought that the Trump administration had not done enough to consult with allies and partners in the region, limit US and Iranian civilian casualties, or pursue a negotiated resolution to the conflict. A plurality concluded that the war was stalemated, with neither side gaining a clear advantage. Few Americans expressed confidence that Iran would comply with a deal to end the conflict. Surprisingly, 48% — including 55% of Independents — lacked confidence that the United States would comply either. It is not hard to see why public sentiments about the war have become more negative since it began. As the interruption of shipping moving through the Strait of Hormuz has raised oil prices above \$100 per barrel, Americans are paying much more for gasoline — and for the diesel fuel on which the US trucking industry mostly depends. Because trucks transport more than 70% of goods in the United States, higher fuel costs tend to raise prices throughout the economy. Similarly, the shutdown of shipping raised the prices farmers pay for fertilizer as they entered the spring planting season. The most recent Producer Price Index report, which tracks prices businesses pay for their inputs, showed costs surging by 6% from a year ago, 1.4% in April alone. Consumers are faring no better. The most recent Consumer Price Index showed consumer costs rising by 3.8% from a year ago, the most rapid increase in three years, and enough to wipe out the inflation-adjusted wage gains that workers had made during the past 12 months.



THE ECONOMIST

The news is bad on the fiscal front as well. The publicly announced cost of the war continues to rise (the most recent estimate was \$29 billion), but the actual costs will be much higher. US weapons stockpiles will have to be replenished, damages to US facilities in the Middle East (which are more extensive than the administration has acknowledged) will have to be repaired, and maintenance costs for ships deployed far beyond their normal rotations are bound to rise. Weeks ago, the administration surfaced, and then quietly pulled back, a \$200 billion supplementary bill for the military. But recent reports of cash shortages to fund ongoing operations suggest that the Pentagon will be forced to make a formal request for supplemental funding well before the end of the fiscal year. The size of the bill is likely to induce heartburn for Congress and the electorate alike. Since the beginning of Trump's second term, the share of Americans who regard the budget deficit as a very big problem has risen from 57% to 64%, and sharp increases in military expenditures can only intensify this concern.

The longer-term political impact of the Iran war

• **President Donald Trump:** Public approval of Trump's performance has declined throughout most of his second term, but the Iran war appears to have accelerated the drop. One in four Americans who voted for him in 2024 opposes the war. Since it began, the president's job approval has declined by more than three percentage points, to just 40%, while his disapproval has risen to 57%.

This matters because a president's level of public support significantly influences the outcome of the midterm elections. As of the end of May, Democrats' edge over the Republicans has risen to 6.8 points, a swing of more than nine points from 2024, enough to overcome Republican gains in the national

redistricting war, and Democratic prospects in the Senate have brightened as well. A Democratic victory in the House of Representatives would bring the president's legislative agenda to a halt and expose his administration to the congressional oversight that it has not experienced thus far. A broader Democratic victory extending to the Senate would force the president to account for the opposition's views on potential nominees, and Make America Great Again (MAGA) stalwarts would be difficult to confirm.

• **The Republican Party:** The coalition that returned Trump to the White House in November 2024 had three main components: Republicans who identified as supporters of the MAGA movement, Republicans who did not support MAGA, and non-Republicans who saw Trump as preferable to the alternative. Many members of the third group — independents, Hispanics, and young adults — had jumped ship before the war in Iran started. The war has exposed differences between MAGA and non-MAGA Republicans, who are less supportive of the decision to attack Iran, and it has created a rift within the MAGA movement. Led by Tucker Carlson, some MAGA supporters regarded going to war against Iran as antithetical to MAGA's core beliefs. Some critics of the war charged that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had persuaded Trump to start a war that served Israel's interests more than America's, adding fuel to eruptions of antisemitic sentiments on the right.

Vice President JD Vance, whose support for MAGA is more ideological than Trump's, made no secret of his opposition to starting the Iran war. But once the president decided to move forward, the vice president had no choice but to support him. If he decides to seek the Republican presidential nomination in 2028, his balancing act could rekindle charges that he

is a man without fixed principles and invite challenges from candidates who insist that "America First" means opposition to wars of choice, especially in the Middle East.

• **The Democratic Party:** At first glance, the war in Iran has worked to the Democrats' advantage. They are nearly unanimous in opposing it, putting them on the side of a wide majority of the electorate. They have drawn blood by linking the war to high prices and calling attention to the administration's shifting rationale for the conflict. On the other hand, some Democrats have embraced the charge that Israel persuaded Trump to initiate a war that serves Israel's interests more than those of the United States, adding to the anti-Israel sentiment that is rising among the party's rank-and-file supporters in response to wars in the region, especially the war in Gaza, that precede the conflict with Iran. This shift away from the party's historic support for Israel could induce candidates for the 2028 Democratic presidential nomination to adopt positions that the majority of the electorate finds extreme. Pro-Israel candidates who refuse to trim their sails could be screened out, even if they would be strong nominees for the general election.

Deciding to go to war

As the war passed the 60-day mark, Democrats began a series of attempts to invoke the War Powers Resolution, which would have required the administration to obtain majority support in both the House and the Senate in order to continue the conflict. Although the maneuver failed, more Republicans are now joining in. The most recent effort succeeded in the House by a vote of 215-208 as four Republicans joined with the Democrats to support it.

This strategy rests on a firm foundation of public support. A survey conducted just weeks before the war began found 70% of the electorate agreeing that presidents should receive congressional approval before taking military action against another country.

Even if invoking the War Powers Resolution ultimately receives majority support in both chambers, the administration is unlikely to comply. (The congressional resolution is subject to a presidential veto, and there are no immediate prospects of mustering the two-thirds majority needed to override it.) Still, the fight is likely to increase public awareness of this legal mechanism and reinforce the constitutional principle that the president is not free to take the country to war without congressional assent.

Over the past half century, as executive power has increased at Congress' expense, presidents of both political parties have violated this principle. In history's hindsight, it is possible that Trump's decision to bypass Congress and the American people in Iran will mark the moment at which Congress began to exercise its constitutional prerogatives and unchecked presidential power began to recede. In the short term, invoking the War Powers Resolution is one of the few options opponents of the war can pursue to reflect the public's desire to end it.

The article was first published by Brookings.



About 12,000 people, including MAGA supporters, attend the No Kings 3 rally in Santa Barbara, US, on March 28, 2026.

ASTON SMITH/NEWS-PRESS

FIFA World Cup:

'Like a disaster': Qalenoeei, Taremi decry Iran's mistreatment after New Zealand draw

Sports Desk

Iran head coach Amir Qalenoeei and skipper Mahdi Taremi expressed frustration over the co-host's treatment of their team after opening their World Cup campaign with a 2-2 draw against New Zealand in Group G in Los Angeles, California, on Monday. Elijah Just gave New Zealand the lead early in each half, only to see Iran fight back twice through Ramin Rezaeian and Mohammad Mohebbi to salvage a point at SoFi Stadium.

Iran's preparation for the showpiece was dominated by months of politically charged controversy amid a military conflict between the country and co-host United States, which was perhaps evident in Sunday's pre-match press conference, when Taremi quipped in his closing remarks that "nobody asked football-related questions."

However, for more than 100 minutes of action on the pitch, Team Melli was finally able to focus on the beautiful game itself.

Qalenoeei's men – six of whom had been without competitive football since late February due to wartime circumstances in the country – were caught off guard seven minutes into the game as Just linked up with Nottingham Forest striker Chris Wood before smashing home a half-volley from inside the box.

Rezaeian drew Iran level shortly after the half-hour



Iran's Ramin Rezaeian (23) celebrates with teammates after scoring during a 2-2 draw against New Zealand at the FIFA World Cup in Los Angeles, California, U.S., on June 15, 2026. **REUTERS**

mark, reacting quickest to a blocked shot to poke the ball past the advancing goalkeeper – a historic strike for the 35-year-old fullback, who became the first Iranian to score at different World Cups. Just put his side back in front by combining with Wood again and lofting the ball over Iranian goalkeeper Alireza Beiranvand nine minutes after the break.

Iran restored parity for a second time 10 minutes later, with Rezaeian delivering an inch-perfect cross for Mo-

hebbi to power a header in off the inside of the post. After the match, Qalenoeei said the Iranian delegation was ordered to leave the United States and return to its training base in Mexico only a few hours after the game.

The team had expected to spend the night in California to maximize its recovery time, only to be told that everyone had to immediately board a flight for the 140-mile trip back to Tijuana. "They didn't even give us time

to recover," Qalenoeei said through an interpreter. "After the game today, they said to us, 'You have to leave immediately.' It's very important for us to have time for recovery, but we are being asked to get on a plane and return to our camp in Tijuana, and we are really troubled by that."

"We don't know why they are sending us back, to be honest," Qalenoeei said. "I think it's very strange. It seems like others are doing the planning for us. The decision-making for us is being made else-

where. We were supposed to come two nights before the game, and we were supposed to stay tonight to recover and return tomorrow at lunchtime. We have no idea why.

"I think our team is perhaps the most oppressed at the World Cup."

Taremi and Qalenoeei both decried the absence of several important staff members who were denied visas by the United States, further complicating the team's preparations.

"We have to leave Los Angeles right now, and it's not good for us," Taremi said about an hour after the match. "I think FIFA has to help us more than this. ... Everything is like a disaster, actually, for us."

Qalenoeei said several players developed cramps during the game, which was played in mild conditions, attributing the physical issues to the lack of proper preparation time caused by Iran's bureaucratic and diplomatic obstacles.

"Before the game, I said we haven't had time to adjust because of the travel," Qalenoeei said. "Many of our players had cramps, and that's why we had to substitute them. It wasn't for technical reasons. It was because of injuries and cramping. They will be examined on Tuesday by our medical staff, but the fact that they delayed our arrival and are forcing us to go back early without time for recovery is making the situation more difficult."

Several hundred Iranian

Americans seized the occasion in Los Angeles – home to a large Iranian diaspora community – to protest against the Islamic Republic outside the venue and in the stands by displaying Lion and Sun flags, Iran's official flag before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, despite FIFA's attempts to keep them away.

Yet the vast majority of the crowd vocally supported the Iranian players once the match kicked off.

"I think today marked a watershed moment for our football," Qalenoeei said, adding: "Many Iranians with different views and beliefs were in the stadium, but they all united in support of their national team and cheered with all their hearts. To me, that was the true victory of this match. Around 70,000 people attended the game, a large number of them Iranians, and they supported Iran wholeheartedly. This could prove to be a turning point in our country's history."

Taremi echoed his coach's sentiment, saying: "It was an incredible atmosphere throughout the match. It felt like home for us."

The result, coupled with the 1-1 stalemate between Belgium and Egypt earlier in the day, left all four Group G teams level on points.

Iran will return to SoFi Stadium on Sunday to take on European heavyweight Belgium before facing Egypt five days later at Lumen Field in Seattle, Washington.

Hedayati stuns Mirzazadeh as Iran completes Greco-Roman squad for Wrestling Worlds

Sports Desk

Fardin Hedayati pulled off a major upset on Tuesday, defeating reigning world super-heavyweight champion Amin Mirzazadeh to secure Iran's Greco-Roman 130kg berth for the Wrestling World Championships in Astana, Kazakhstan, in October.

Under the national team trials regulations, Mirzazadeh needed just one victory in the best-of-three series against his younger rival to earn a chance to pursue a third world title.

Hedayati, however, had other plans. The 22-year-old, who

owns five world gold medals across various age groups, claimed a commanding 5-1 victory in the opening bout before being awarded the second after Mirzazadeh withdrew through injury.

The victory completes Iran's Greco-Roman lineup for the World Championships and marks another statement result for one of the country's most promising heavyweights. Hedayati enjoyed a glorious 2025 campaign, winning gold at the Asian Championships, the Islamic Solidarity Games and, most notably, the U23 World Championships.

He first announced himself on the senior international stage at the 2024 Ranking Series event in Budapest, where he outmuscled Turkish legend Riza Kayaalp – winner of 13 world and Olympic medals – in the quarterfinals before defeating Georgian Olympic silver medalist Iakobi Kajaia in the final. Hedayati will head to Astana full of confidence despite Kayaalp's return to competition following an 18-month doping ban. The Turkish veteran marked his comeback by capturing gold at the European Championships in Tirana last April.

Hedayati will be part of a

star-studded Iranian squad led by reigning world and Olympic champions Saeid Esmaeili (67kg) and Mohammad-Hadi Saravi (97kg).

Looking to defend its world team title, head coach Hassan Rangraz's 10-man roster will also include world silver medalist Payam Ahmadi (55kg), Ali Ahmadi-Vafa (60kg), Mohammad-Mahdi Keshtkar (63kg), Danial Sohrabi (72kg), Ali Oskou (77kg), world champion Gholamreza Farrokhi (82kg), and Alireza Mohmadi (87kg), who has claimed back-to-back world silver medals on either side of his Olympic silver at



Fardin Hedayati (8) wrestles Amin Mirzazadeh during the Iranian national team trials in the Greco-Roman 130kg category in Kerman, Iran, on June 16, 2026. **IAWFIR**

Paris 2024. Mirzazadeh, meanwhile, is expected to represent Iran at the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games in

Japan in September, where he will bid for a second consecutive gold medal at the continental multi-sport event.

Interim coach Bakhtiarzadeh handed permanent Esteghlal job

Sports Desk

Sohrab Bakhtiarzadeh has been appointed Esteghlal's head coach for the upcoming Persian Gulf Pro League season, the Iranian top-flight club announced on Tuesday.

Bakhtiarzadeh, 48, took charge on an interim basis at the Tehran Blues in late February, replacing Portuguese coach Ricardo Sa Pinto, and

led his side to a 2-1 home victory over Fajr Sepasi before the Iranian league was suspended due to the country's war with the United States and Israel.

"Following the evaluation of numerous domestic and foreign candidates, Esteghlal's technical committee and board of directors have selected Sohrab Bakhtiarzadeh as the head



FOOTBALL360

coach for next season," the club said in a statement. The former Iran international and Esteghlal center back has served as the club's interim coach on three separate occasions since October 2024.

In his first stint, Esteghlal recorded one win and two defeats in three league matches before South African coach Pitso Mosimane was appointed as the permanent head

coach.

He returned to the bench after Mosimane parted ways with the club later in the season, guiding Esteghlal to three wins and two draws in five matches across all competitions.

In the final match of his second spell in charge, Esteghlal secured a crucial 2-0 away victory over Qatar's Al Rayyan in its final league-phase

match to book a place in the AFC Champions League Elite round of 16.

Esteghlal was top of the table when the Iranian Football Federation called off the remaining seven rounds of the top-flight season, meaning the Tehran club will be joined by second-placed Tractor SC in representing Iran in the AFC Champions League Elite next season.

Shiraz accessible tourism plan highlighted at Taste of Hope Festival

Iranica Desk

The Director-General for Domestic Tourism Development at Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts has announced plans to designate Shiraz as one of the country's accessible tourism cities, saying the initiative aims to advance the broader concept of an "accessible tourism city," going beyond conventional urban accessibility measures. Mostafa Fatemi Firouzabadi made the remarks at the closing ceremony of the Taste of Hope Festival held in Shiraz, stating that the project involves fully standardizing an entire tourism corridor, including facilities, shops, and pedestrian routes, to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities, according to IRNA.

He called on the provincial governor's office, the Fars Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, and the Shiraz Municipality to work with the national accessibility task force to create the necessary conditions for Shiraz to be recognized in this field, following a previous pause in the initiative. Fatemi Firouzabadi also praised the prominent role of experts from Fars Province in national food and herbal beverage working groups, noting that many of Iran's leading figures in the culinary sector originate from the province. He emphasized that the goal of the tourism working groups is to transfer responsibilities to the public and the private sector, adding that the participation of specialized food teams and dis-

ability-focused organizations in the festival reflects progress toward the socialization of tourism development. At the conclusion of the event, winners of the regional stage of the "Taste of Hope" Festival were introduced and advanced to the national competition. Meanwhile, the coordinator of the Accessible Tourism Desk also addressed the ceremony, highlighting the event as the result of strong synergy between government institutions and the private sector. Mohammad Esmail Sheikhqaraei said the initiative, which began as a simple proposal, has now become so institutionalized that it is irreversible. He added that even if government officials face fatigue or budget



● ISNA

constraints, the movement must continue through public participation and civic organizations. Sheikhqaraei further noted the

close cooperation between the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, the State Welfare Organization, and the private sector, saying the festi-

val's outcomes will help promote a culture of respect and redefine the status of persons with disabilities nationwide.

Zaleh-Zard; key wildlife refuge in Zagros region

Iranica Desk

Kermanshah Province, covering an area of 2.499 million hectares, is one of Iran's regions with remarkable climatic and ecological diversity. Approximately 70 percent of the province consists of natural resource areas, including more than 527,000 hectares of forests and 1.192 million hectares of rangelands. Among the protected areas managed by the Provincial Department of Environment, the Zaleh-Zard Wildlife Refuge holds a special status. Located in southwestern Kermanshah Province, within the counties of Gilan-e Gharb and Sarpol-e

Zahab, the refuge covers more than 40,000 hectares and has been under protection since 1991, according to IRNA. Environmental experts state that its border location, distinctive topography, rugged mountains, and diverse vegetation have made Zaleh-Zard one of the most important wildlife habitats in western Iran. Its numerous highlands, valleys, seasonal streams, and forest and rangeland ecosystems provide suitable habitats for a wide range of animal species. The refuge is part of the network of protected areas managed by Iran's Department of Environment in Kermanshah

Province. Thanks to its diverse habitats, Kermanshah is home to notable species such as the Persian leopard, brown bear, roe deer, gazelle, wild goat, and wild sheep, as well as dozens of other mammal, bird, and reptile species. Due to its location along the natural ecological corridors of the Zagros Mountains, Zaleh-Zard serves as a vital habitat and movement corridor for many of these species. Birds of prey are among the most important wildlife groups in the region. Eagles, buzzards, and other raptors play an essential role in regulating rodent populations

and maintaining ecological balance, forming a key component of this valuable ecosystem. Experts emphasize that protecting Zaleh-Zard means more than preserving a geographic area; it represents the conservation of part of Iran's natural capital and the biological heritage of the Zagros Mountains. In addition to its ecological importance, the area has considerable potential for nature-based tourism, birdwatching, environmental education, and scientific research. With more than 240,000 hectares of protected areas under environmental management,

Kermanshah is considered one of Iran's most important habitats for brown bears, and the Zaleh-Zard Wildlife Refuge plays a significant role in maintaining this status. Today, increasing human pressures, overgrazing, habitat degradation, wildfires (both natural and human-caused),

and climate change are among the major threats facing natural ecosystems. Continued conservation efforts, stronger ranger patrols, local community participation, and increased environmental awareness can play a decisive role in protecting this valuable natural heritage.



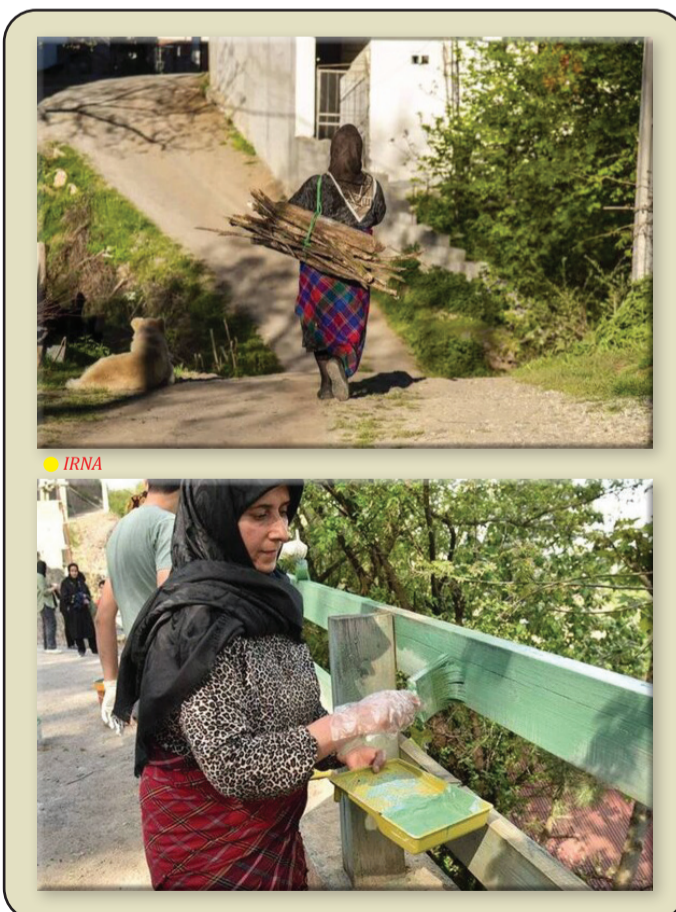
● IRNA

Women building new future for Shaneh Tarash village

Iranica Desk

Women in northern Iran, particularly in villages located between the Alborz Mountains and the Caspian Sea, have historically played a significant role in the local economy. The continuous and influential participation of rural women in traditional occupations such as agriculture, livestock farming, and handicraft production has made them essential contributors to local livelihoods and household economies across the northern provinces, particularly Mazandaran Province. From the demanding and physically challenging tasks of farming to livestock care, gardening, silkworm cultivation, and many other traditional activities, rural women in Mazandaran Province have long carried responsibilities that remain part of daily life in many villages and towns across the province. Their partnership with male family members and their contribution to shared economic life can still be observed today. This culture of cooperation and working side by side to strengthen community life remains visible in the worldview of Mazandaran Province's rural women. One of the clearest examples can be found in Shaneh Tarash village, where strong social participation by women has played a major role in advancing the vil-

lage's development goals. The inclusion of Shaneh Tarash village among the eight Iranian villages nominated for registration on the United Nations World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) list of Best Tourism Villages 2026 is the result of collective efforts and cooperation among residents to place the village on a path toward sustainable development. However, the significant role of Shaneh Tarash women in maintaining and advancing these initiatives has been particularly remarkable. A few hours spent exploring Shaneh Tarash and observing local life clearly reveals how women in this village, alongside their responsibilities at home and within their families, actively contribute to the village's development. The presence of women can be strongly felt across the village's collective activities. In some cases, women themselves have become the leading forces behind social and economic initiatives centered on rural and cultural tourism. From Khaleh Mehri (Auntie Mehri), who nearly a decade ago began producing handicrafts and preparing local foods after noticing her daughter's interest in studying tourism and receiving encouragement from one of her teachers, to Khaleh Raveyeh (Auntie Raveyeh), whose homemade dishes have become unforget-



● IRNA

table memories for visitors, and many other women who have each contributed in their own way over the past decade to transforming Shaneh Tarash into a respected rural tourism destination — these women are

all central figures in turning the village into a model of tourism development based on community participation. The Deputy head of Mazandaran Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organi-

zation said that Shaneh Tarash's growth in tourism is the result of social cohesion among villagers working toward sustainable development. Speaking to IRNA, Mehdi Es'haghi said, "There is no doubt that a significant part of this social cohesion in Shaneh Tarash has been created through the commitment and active involvement of the village's women." He added that women's meaningful participation in the village is not limited to direct economic activities related to tourism, such as selling food, local products, and handicrafts. The strong presence of Shaneh Tarash women in social and cultural development initiatives, as well as in efforts carried out by the cooperative, village administration, and village council, demonstrates how influential and decisive their role has become. Referring to plans for empowering the local community through initiatives led by residents and facilitators, Es'haghi noted that, in support of vulnerable women and youth, and with the aim of economic empowerment and sustainable income generation, the Shaneh Tarash Rural Development Cooperative Unit has allocated part of its creative hub space to these groups through an incentive package. The initiative aims to improve the quality and effectiveness of empowerment programs.

Under this plan, local producers can offer their products directly to customers through the handicrafts store, eliminating intermediaries. Free training workshops in areas such as skill development, marketing, and branding are also being held to strengthen their capabilities. According to Es'haghi, the initiative supports small businesses, home-based enterprises, rural employment, and local community development, while creating opportunities for producers to access markets and increase their sales. He added that the Shaneh Tarash Rural Development Cooperative is seeking to strengthen women's and youth participation in economic activities through social innovation, community engagement, and sustainable rural development. The goal is to improve quality of life and increase household incomes in the village. Es'haghi emphasized that the women of Shaneh Tarash not only represent the important role of Mazandaran Province's women in the province's local economy, but also, through their involvement in rural and cultural tourism, are helping introduce and preserve aspects of the region's indigenous culture for visitors. In this way, women in Shaneh Tarash have recognized their cultural role within rural tourism and are actively shaping the future of this sector.

Tehran, Beijing eye joint restoration of war-damaged heritage sites



Iran's Deputy Minister of Cultural Heritage Ali Darabi (R) and Chinese Ambassador Cong Peiwu hold a box containing Chinese traditional handicrafts presented to the Iranian side after a meeting in Tehran June 16, 2026. ● CHTN

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran and China are exploring joint efforts to restore historical sites damaged during the recent war, Iranian cultural heritage officials said on Tuesday after talks in Tehran between Deputy Minister of Cultural Heritage Ali Darabi and Chinese Ambassador Cong Peiwu, as the two countries moved to expand cooperation in conservation, tourism and cultural exchanges.

The discussions centered on restoration technologies, knowledge transfer and broader cultural engagement between the two ancient civilizations, with both

sides emphasizing the role of heritage diplomacy in strengthening people-to-people ties, CHTN reported.

"Iran and China have enjoyed deep cultural and friendly relations for more than 2,000 years," Darabi said, expressing hope for greater Chinese tourism and wider collaboration across sectors overseen by Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts.

Darabi called for closer cooperation through the Asian Cultural Heritage Alliance (ACHA), describing the organization as a mechanism for mutual support during crises. He also praised China for

hosting the exhibition Glory of Ancient Iran, calling it a successful example of cultural partnership.

Pointing to damage inflicted on cultural landmarks during the recent conflict, Darabi said 149 historical sites across 20 provinces had been affected, including five UNESCO World Heritage properties, 54 museums and seven historic urban districts. He noted that Tehran's UNESCO-listed Golestan Palace sustained damage after being struck twice during the hostilities.

Seeking Chinese support for reconstruction efforts, Darabi highlighted China's advances in

underwater archaeology, digital preservation, heritage scanning and restoration technologies. "China has achieved valuable results in conservation science, and Iran is interested in benefiting from these experiences," he said.

Cong said Iran and China, as two of the world's oldest civilizations, should continue to broaden cultural cooperation alongside their political and economic relations. He noted that Iranian cultural exhibitions in China have attracted significant public interest, reflecting growing appreciation for Iran's history and civilization among Chinese audiences.

The envoy described the 55th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries as an opportunity to deepen cooperation in tourism and cultural heritage. Recalling a recent visit to Golestan Palace, he called the site "a symbol of the grandeur of Iranian civilization" and voiced regret over the damage it sustained.

Cong welcomed Iran's proposal for cooperation in restoring affected heritage sites and said he would convey the initiative to China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism. "Chinese experts have previously cooperated with their Iranian counterparts in heritage conservation, and this collaboration will continue," he said.

The meeting concluded with an exchange of traditional handicrafts, a symbolic gesture reflecting the enduring cultural bonds between Tehran and Beijing.

Iran expands insurance coverage, approves national rehabilitation plan

Social Desk

Iran is moving to expand insurance coverage for medicines and strengthen rehabilitation services for people with disabilities and injured patients, Health Minister Mohammadreza Zafarghandi said on Tuesday, following decisions adopted at the 20th meeting of the Supreme Council of Health and Food Security. Speaking on the sidelines of the meeting, Zafarghandi said the government is working to ensure that rising pharmaceutical costs do not translate into heavier financial burdens for households, IRNA reported. "The concern of both the Health Ministry and the president is that these changes be offset through insurance coverage so that less pressure is placed on the public," he said.

According to the minister, discussions with insurers, the Central Bank of Iran, the Plan and Budget Organization, and lawmakers are focused on expanding insurance capacity to absorb a larger share of approved medicine costs.

Separately, the council approved a National Rehabilitation Document aimed at integrating rehabilitation services into the treatment process and helping patients return to daily life and employment. Zafarghandi said the ini-

tiative would strengthen support for people with disabilities and others requiring rehabilitation services while promoting closer cooperation among government agencies and healthcare institutions.

The council also adopted new measures to reduce road traffic fatalities, assigning additional responsibilities to transport, safety, and healthcare authorities. Zafarghandi welcomed a decline in road and hospital deaths linked to traffic accidents compared with a year earlier and said sustained efforts would continue to improve safety, particularly for young people and motorcyclists.

On pharmaceutical supplies, the minister said Iran is taking steps to maintain stable production and availability of medicines despite logistical challenges affecting the import of some raw materials.

"We sought to compensate for these shortages through rail and air transport," he said, adding that maintaining an uninterrupted pharmaceutical supply chain remains a top priority.

Zafarghandi said Tehran has intensified consultations with major suppliers, including India and China, and dispatched delegations to explore additional procurement channels and reinforce supply security.

Social drama joins North Macedonia competition



Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian social mystery drama 'Gambler,' directed by Mohsen Bahari, will compete in the competition section of the fifth Across the Lake International Film Festival, set to run from July 8 to 15 in the North Macedonian cities of Dojran, Strumica and Gevgelija. The film, produced by Sajad Nasrollahi and backed by the Farabi Cinema Foundation, will make its interna-

tional debut after being introduced at the 2026 Cannes Film Market. The foundation's international affairs department is handling the film's overseas rollout. 'Gambler,' Bahari's first feature film, follows the aftermath of a cyberattack on a domestic bank, a crisis that casts suspicion on one of the institution's programmers and triggers a race to uncover the truth and safeguard national security. The cast includes Kourosh

Tahami, Armin Rahimi-an, Shabnam Ghorbani, Amir Nourozi, Roshan Rostampour and Emad Emami.

The film previously screened at the Fajr Film Festival, where Bahari won the Crystal Simorgh for Best First-Time Director. The production also earned five additional Crystal Simorgh nominations. The Across the Lake festival, which spotlights cinema from the Balkans and Mediterranean region while welcoming selected international works, will place a special focus on contemporary Iranian filmmaking this year. Festival director Jani Bojadzi said the event would feature Iranian cinema as its country focus and host a world premiere from Iran. "I am pleased that we are recognized as an important festival that hosts world premieres," he said.



AUCTION SJSCO. B140504

Sirjan Jahan Steel Company is pleased to announce the sale and export of 10,000 tons **STEEL BILLET** (Size 150 x 150 mm), with the possibility of increasing the contract amount to 30,000 tons on basis of FOB Bandar Abbas (Other ports are negotiable) according to INCOTERMS 2020. Interested applicants are hereby invited to obtain the tender documents by visiting the official website of Sirjan Jahan Steel Company at sjSCO.ir, through the Sales and customer portal, Tender and Foreign Tender section.

Alternatively, interested bidders may collect the physical tender documents in person from the head office of Sirjan Jahan Steel Company at the following address: 2nd FLOOR, No. 2, JOOBIN ALLEY, SHAHIDI STREET, JAHAN KOODAK JUNCTION, TEHRAN, IRAN

All bids on conformity to tender instruction should be submitted no later than **Monday, June 29, 2026.**

For more information, please contact us at:

Tel: +2186084642



AUCTION SJSCO. D140504

Sirjan Jahan Steel Company is pleased to announce the sale and export of 25,000 tons **DIRECT REDUCED IRON (DRI)**, on basis of FAS at the Buyer's warehouse in Bandar Abbas, IRAN according to INCOTERMS 2020. Interested applicants are hereby invited to obtain the tender documents by visiting the official website of Sirjan Jahan Steel Company at sjSCO.ir, through the Sales and customer portal, Tender and Foreign Tender section.

Alternatively, interested bidders may collect the physical tender documents in person from the head office of Sirjan Jahan Steel Company at the following address: 2nd FLOOR, No. 2, JOOBIN ALLEY, SHAHIDI STREET, JAHAN KOODAK JUNCTION, TEHRAN, IRAN.

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