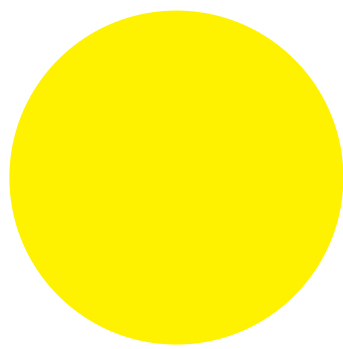




Restoration begins on historic Abbasi Mosque after war damage

8



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Iran rejects Trump's Hormuz remarks; urges him to stop 'indulging in delusions'

Strait will only be opened, closed under Iranian command: **Deputy FM**

2



Islamabad MoU calls for 'end to war', not ceasefire: **Araghchi**

2



Saudi Arabia's doomed gamble
Joint defense pact won't save Riyadh

4



Asian Youth & Junior Weightlifting Championships:
Medals galore as Iran claims four team podiums

6

Tehran, Dushanbe agree on long-term oil supply, fuel export deal

3



Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad hosts a delegation (L) from Tajikistan headed by Energy and Water Resources Minister Daler Juma in Tehran, Iran, on August 15, 2026. SHANA

Amid Riyadh-Islamabad-Ankara defense initiative

Iran wary of joining alliances that could limit its defense autonomy

By Sadeq Dehqan
Staff writer

INTERVIEW EXCLUSIVE

As the region's security dynamics enter a new phase following the recent war, a joint defense agreement between Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Pakistan has put the spotlight on the future of the Middle East's security architecture.



There have also been questions about the possibility of Iran joining the alliance at a later stage, as it has always stressed that regional security should be provided by regional countries without the presence of extra-regional powers. Jafar Ghanadbashi, a Middle East analyst, told Iran Daily that Iran's participation in regional security arrangements is in line with the policies of the

Islamic Republic of Iran, but Tehran has always been concerned about how the structure and command of such an alliance would be defined and does not want its capabilities and armed forces placed in a structure that could ultimately allow restrictions or controls to be imposed on the country's defense decisions.

IRAN DAILY: Can the implications of the pact be analyzed separately from developments involving Iran and the recent regional war? What is your assessment of the nature of this agreement and the speculation surrounding its objectives?

GHANADBASHI: In my view, Saudi Arabia, under the current circumstances, is seeking to strengthen its defense capabilities following the reduction in the US military presence in the region and damage to some of its military bases, and in a way make up for the reduced presence of US forces.

At the same time, the Americans have for years sought to establish some form of military link among regional countries so that they could ultimately create a structure resembling an "Arab NATO" or a regional branch of NATO and use it to advance their objectives. Therefore, saying that this structure is entirely directed against Iran would not be accurate. The main issue is preserving and securing US interests in the region. Even during the fight against Daesh, the Americans sought to establish a regional coalition and create a security structure in the region through it. Therefore, the formation of this agreement can, from one perspective, be seen as an indication of an effort to reduce the need for a direct US presence and hand over some of the security responsibilities sought by Washington to regional countries.

Can the agreement be seen as an attempt to create a proxy security structure in the region?

In my view, the Americans essentially prefer to create proxy structures in regional wars and crises rather than directly step into every conflict. From this perspective, establishing such arrangements could be desirable for the US.

What factors could prevent the formation of a cohesive military alliance among the three countries?

The most important issue is the ideological, political and even cultural differences among these countries. The armies that are supposed to operate alongside one another need to share a degree of convergence and a common outlook, and they need years of joint training and cooperation. Such a thing cannot be created easily. For example, there are differing views on religious and political issues among Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkey. At the same time, Turkey and Pakistan have particular sensitivities regarding the issue of Palestine and

Israel. Therefore, any move by this alliance that is perceived as being aligned with the interests of Israel or the US could face domestic constraints and public opposition in these countries. Consequently, simply putting three armies together does not mean that a joint army or an effective military alliance will emerge.

How significant are Saudi Arabia's concerns over threats from Yemen in shaping the agreement?

This could be one of the important motivations. Saudi Arabia's experience in the Yemen war showed that the country faces serious challenges on the military front. Saudi Arabia launched the war against Yemen in 2015 with a coalition of several countries. Pakistan and Turkey were also initially mentioned, but ultimately did not join the coalition. The experience of the Yemen war showed that Saudi Arabia is not necessarily successful in forming broad military coalitions against a country.

Could concerns over Iran's growing power be a factor behind the agreement?

Yes, naturally, one of the concerns is the emergence of a powerful Iran in the region. In the past, they had to some extent relied on US presence and support, but that security structure has come under strain. They are therefore seeking to establish new arrangements.

However, it remains questionable how successful this agreement could be against Iran. Saudi Arabia is highly vulnerable today, and its experience confronting Yemen has also demonstrated this.

On the other hand, if this structure were to be used directly against Iran, it should be noted that Turkey and Pakistan would also pay a heavy price. Therefore, it would not be realistic to assume that these two countries could easily and without domestic and regional consequences enter into a military confrontation with Iran.

Page 3

Iran rejects Trump's Hormuz remarks; urges him to stop 'indulging in delusions'

Strait will only be opened, closed under Iranian command: **Deputy FM**

International Desk

Iran called on the US to "accept the reality of defeat and stop indulging in delusions" after President Donald Trump suggested that he would soon declare the Strait of Hormuz as a "territory of the United States."

The crucial waterway that handled one-fifth of the world's oil before the war "cannot be seized with a tweet, nor with an aircraft carrier, nor by issuing an order, nor through an election speech," Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi said in a post on X early Saturday.

"This strait will only be opened and closed under Iran's command, and as long as you do not accept the reality of defeat and stop indulging in delusions, Iran will continue to enforce the blockade," he added.

With oil tanker traffic through the strategic strait at a trickle and peace talks between the US

and Iran at an impasse, there are few signs that the war, launched by the US and Israel on Iran on February 28, is close to being over.

A 60-day negotiating period intended to hammer out a deal to end the conflict, set when Trump and Tehran signed a memorandum of understanding in mid-June, ends on Monday with few direct negotiations having taken place.

Speaking Friday at a police academy in Nassau County, New York, Trump claimed Iran was being "very badly defeated," and once victory was secured, "pretty soon, I'll be declaring the Hormuz Strait a territory of the United States."

An unnamed White House official later clarified that Trump was joking, the Wall Street Journal reported.

Iran declared the Strait of Hormuz closed in response to the unprovoked US-Israeli aggres-

sion that targeted the country from February 28 until April 7. The US and Iran signed a memorandum of understanding in June to end the cycle that had resulted from the aggression.

Tehran subsequently reopened the strait, but was forced to re-impose the closure after Washington began interfering with the legal transit mechanism that Tehran had devised for passage through the chokepoint in line with the understanding. Earlier in August, Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) conditioned reopening of the waterway to realization of such imperatives as the US's permanently ending aggression against Iran and its regional allies, lifting its illegal naval blockade and all sanctions against the Islamic Republic, returning the country's frozen assets, and paying compensation for the damage resulting from the aggression.



A vessel moves past a barge along the Strait of Hormuz off Bandar Abbas in southern Iran on August 10, 2026.
● AFP

Global oil and gas markets have calmed since prices spiked at the start of the war, but prices are still significantly higher than before the conflict, and rose

again early Friday.

Traffic through the Strait of Hormuz remains a trickle of the 130-140 vessels that typically traverse it during peace-

time. Only two vessels passed through the strait on Friday, with no crude oil shipments visible, according to analysis from ship-tracking firm Kpler.

Islamabad MoU calls for 'end to war', not ceasefire: **Araghchi**

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi disputed descriptions of the understanding reached under the Islamabad memorandum between Iran and the United States in June, saying it called for an "end to the war", rather than a ceasefire.

In an interview with news outlet Shahrara News published on Saturday, Araghchi said the US had violated the understanding and that hostilities had resumed. As a result, he said, there was no such thing as a "60-day ceasefire" that would now need to be extended.

He said the 60-day period referred to a window for negotiations aimed at reaching a final agreement, rather than a ceasefire period. The 60-day negotiating period ends on Monday with few direct negotiations having taken place.

The Iranian foreign minister added that Tehran is still undecided about resuming talks with the US amid disagreements about ceasefire violations and the future of the Strait of Hormuz.

Mediators from both Qatar and Pakistan are exchanging messages and are in contact with Iran, "but this does not mean negotiations", he said. Araghchi blamed the US for the return to violence following the signing of the MoU in Pakistan, and said a new path out of the conflict must be defined.



Abbas Araghchi
● IRNA

Shipping in Strait of Hormuz

He said Iran is separately working with Oman on a technical process to establish new routes for shipping in the Strait of Hormuz, but any transit of ships is contingent on a political solution being reached.

"The routes that previously existed are no longer functional, and a new route must be defined. We are currently designing a temporary route that will become the final route in the next stages," the minister said. He added that "whether or not shipping traffic in the Strait of Hormuz resumes ... depends on the fulfillment of other conditions that the United States must adhere to". The US and the Israeli regime launched their illegal war of aggression against Iran on February 28 by assassinating Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, along with senior military commanders.

However, forty days later on April 8, the enemies were forced to accept a ceasefire amid Iran's resistance,

successful retaliatory operations, and powerful grip on the Strait of Hormuz.

Tehran and Washington signed the Islamabad MoU on June 17, but the US effectively violated the agreement by striking Iran.

In response, the Iranian Armed Forces have conducted devastating attacks against strategic American targets across West Asia. Iran has also closed the Strait of Hormuz in response to the aggression.

US shifting to economic pressure

Following six months of fighting that has failed to fulfil Washington and Israel's aim of opening the Strait of Hormuz, the US now appears to be signaling a move towards the use of economic pressure to achieve its goals.

On Thursday, US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said the US will soon apply new economic measures to pressure Iran.

"It will be a combination of economic isolation the world has never seen before, and the continued blockade in the Strait of Hormuz that will keep anything from going in or out of the Iranian ports," he said in an interview on Newsmax.

This strategy is not new: Iran has faced a web of ever-tightening economic sanctions from the US and others since the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

President congratulates India on 80th Independence Day



Narendra Modi

Masoud Pezeshkian

International Desk

President Masoud Pezeshkian congratulates Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the government and people of India on the 80th anniversary of the country's independence, describing the occasion as an opportunity to deepen and expand longstanding bilateral relations. Pezeshkian said in a Saturday message to Modi that the deep historical, cultural, civilizational, and popular ties between the two nations are a valuable asset for creating brighter prospects in bilateral relations based on common interests. The Iranian president emphasized Iran's determination to further strengthen comprehensive relations with India, adding that Iran is prepared, through mutual trust and respect and by utilizing the two countries' extensive existing capacities, to take more effective steps

toward consolidating bilateral relations and securing the common interests of the two nations.

In his message, Pezeshkian also prayed for India's growing dignity, progress, prosperity and happiness, and for further strength and flourishing of the longstanding relations between the two countries.

Independence Day is celebrated annually on 15 August as a public holiday in India commemorating the nation's independence from the United Kingdom on 15 August 1947. On this day the Indian Independence Act 1947 came into effect, transferring legislative sovereignty to the Indian Constituent Assembly.

India marked its 80th Independence Day at Delhi's historic Red Fort, featuring Prime Minister Narendra Modi hoisting the national flag, as well as a military parade.

Intelligence Ministry demands answers from France over diplomats' activities

Iran's Intelligence Ministry warned France against interfering in the country's internal affairs, saying Paris must answer for the illegal activities of its diplomats.

In a statement on Saturday, the ministry said its forces had discovered the presence of two French diplomats at a secret meeting place while carrying out a judicial order to arrest two suspects in a major case involving foreign infiltration and interference, Press TV reported.

In July 2026, two French diplomats were briefly detained in Tehran after they were found at a meeting linked to a security investigation.

France accused Iranian security forces of mistreating the diplomats, while Tehran

rejected the allegations and said they had been questioned over "unconventional" conduct.

The ministry said the two diplomats had "extensive records of violations and conduct contrary to domestic laws and diplomatic obligations."

After their identities were verified, the matter was reported to the Foreign Ministry, and the diplomats were handed over to Iran's ambassador to France in the presence of diplomatic police, it said.

The ministry further said France subsequently launched a media campaign aimed at deflecting attention from the violations, saying an initial examination of documents found at the site revealed a project involv-

ing foreign infiltration and interference.

"Initial investigations indicate the planning and design of an extensive project with objectives such as infiltration, foreign interference and paving the way for France to take action against the country's independence, through identifying, establishing covert contacts inside and outside the country, and creating networks, along with principles of secrecy, with some individuals of interest to foreigners," the statement said.

The ministry also said that contracts uncovered as part of the project bore the signature of a former French ambassador to Iran, and said the French government must explain its actions.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist

CARTOON



Tehran, Dushanbe agree on long-term oil supply, fuel export deal

Economy Desk

Iran and Tajikistan have agreed on the framework of a long-term deal to export oil products and supply crude oil to Tajikistan's refineries, Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad said on Saturday.

Speaking at a meeting with Tajik Energy and Water Resources Minister Daler Juma and Transport Minister Aziz Ibrahim, Paknejad said the framework for a long-term agreement between the two countries had been finalized, IRNA reported.

"This was the third in-person meeting with Tajik officials over the past two years," Paknejad said, adding that "the bulk of the negotiations focused on the possibility of exporting our surplus oil products to help resolve some of the energy problems of our friend and brother Tajikistan."

"It was agreed that a technical working group would examine the technical and logistical details of the co-

operation, with the basis of the work being a long-term contract to supply both fuel and the crude oil needed by Tajikistan's refineries," he said.

Paknejad said most of the previous agreements between the two countries were also now being implemented and operational.

"This agreement can resolve this country's fuel problems amid the global energy crisis and increase the volume of trade between the two countries beyond 800,000 tons," he said.

Juma said Dushanbe's main goal was to increase imports of fuel products from Tehran, adding that the oil sector was one of the biggest areas of potential bilateral cooperation amid the global energy crisis.

After meeting with Paknejad, Ibrahim said about 800,000 tons of oil products were currently being transported between Iran and Tajikistan, adding that the volume could increase significantly following the talks and

the launch of the joint working group.

"To this end, we will examine ways to transport oil products. There is currently the capacity to transport this volume, but given the plans to increase the volume, the necessary measures must be taken to expand transport and logistics capacity," he said.

Ibrahim said plans were being made to increase the volume of oil products and crude oil transported between Tehran and Dushanbe, adding that further talks would be held soon on increasing the volume.

He also highlighted the importance of logistics in expanding energy cooperation between the two countries, ac-



Iranian Oil Minister Mohsen Paknejad (R) shakes hands with Tajik Energy and Water Resources Minister Daler Juma after a meeting in Tehran on Aug. 15, 2026.
● SHANA

cording to Mehr news agency.

"One of the fundamental issues in this regard is logistics and the routes for transporting oil products," Ibrahim

said.

He said talks would be held with neighboring countries to provide the necessary infrastructure.

Bandar Abbas airport resumes flights after wartime damage



Economy Desk

Iran's Bandar Abbas International Airport resumed flight operations on Saturday, returning to the country's network of active airports after being damaged during the war, Iranian media reported.

Some Iranian airports were taken out of operation during attacks by the United States and Israel that began on Feb. 28 because of infrastructure damage and the need for safety checks and repairs.

The General Department of Hormozgan Airports said flights from Bandar Abbas had resumed on routes to Tehran, Mashhad and Isfahan.

Kazem Tavassoli, director general of Hormozgan airports, said the Bandar Abbas airport had been ready for domestic and international flights for some time and that limited flights had resumed in recent days.

Scheduled flights on the Tehran-Bandar Abbas route and the return service began on

Saturday, he said.

Iran Airtour, Sepehran, Kish Air, Varesht and Meraj airlines will also begin operating from Bandar Abbas according to schedule, Tavassoli said.

Before the war, the airport handled 35 to 40 domestic and international flights a day, but flights were suspended after the attacks began, he said.

The gradual reopening of airports damaged during the war has begun in recent weeks. Reports have also emerged of flights resuming at Qeshm airport after security conditions stabilized.

Seven Iranian airports were targeted during the 40-day war, with attacks focusing more on tourism, passenger and cargo infrastructure than on military facilities, according to Iranian media.

Following the ceasefire reached on April 8 between Washington and Tehran, Iran Air resumed domestic flights on April 25 after a 55-day suspension, with its first service operating between

Tehran and Mashhad.

International flights also resumed in late April, beginning with an Iran Air Hajj flight to the holy Saudi city of Medina from Imam Khomeini International Airport, with flights to three destinations operating on the first day.

Aviation industry continues operations

Iran's aviation industry has continued to operate despite damage to some infrastructure and aircraft during the two recent wars, the head of the Civil Aviation Organization said.

Iran was also targeted by Israel in a 12-day war in June last year.

Abuzar Shiroudi said major air operations, including Hajj and Arbaeen flights, had been carried out without serious disruption despite the damage.

He attributed part of the reduced damage to the aviation industry to the use of dispersion and said the entry of new aircraft into the country and repairs to damaged facilities were also on the agenda.

Some radar restrictions may result in changes or rerouting of certain flights, although the restrictions do not affect all flights, Shiroudi said.

Some navigation equipment at airports has also been damaged, he said, adding that repair work was under way.

Iran oil, condensate output rises 300,000 bpd in July, EIA data shows

Economy Desk

Iran's oil and condensate production rose by 300,000 barrels per day (bpd) in July from the previous month to 3.91 million bpd, the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) said in its latest report, according to Tasnim news agency.

Iran's oil and condensate output had also increased by 150,000 bpd in June from the previous month, marking a second consecutive monthly rise since the start of the conflict in the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran produced 3 million bpd of crude oil and 910,000 bpd of condensates in July, the report showed. Crude oil production rose by 200,000 bpd from June, while condensate production increased by 100,000 bpd.

The signing of a memorandum of understanding between Iran and the United States after 40 days of war on April 8 and a reduction in maritime restrictions were the main factors behind the increase in Iran's oil production in July, according to the report.

The increase was also reflected in the latest data from OPEC's secretariat based on secondary sources. Iran's oil production rose by 26,000 bpd in July from the previous month to 2.478 million bpd, according to the data. Iran's output increased from 2.451 million bpd in June, keeping the country in third place among OPEC producers.

Saudi Arabia remained the group's largest producer with output of 7.352 million bpd, followed by Iraq

at 2.621 million bpd.

Total crude oil production by OPEC members rose by 1.659 million bpd in July from the previous month to 23.632 million bpd, according to OPEC data.

The Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most important energy transit routes, has been at the center of contention between Iran and the United States since the latter waged a war of aggression with Israel against the Islamic Republic in late February.

In response, Iran closed the strait and began talks with Oman to establish a joint mechanism for shipping arrangements. The move pushed oil prices from around \$70 a barrel to above \$100, with prices topping \$110 on some days.

TPO says three foreign trade hubs remain active despite restrictions

Economy Desk

Three Iranian trade hubs outside the country's borders remain active and road transit through Iran is continuing despite wartime restrictions, a Trade Promotion Organization official said.

Ali Emami, director general of logistics and support at the TPO, told ILNA that Pakistan's Karachi port, a route through China and a route through Turkey could serve as Iranian trade hubs under current conditions.

He said the Trade Promotion Organization was using Iranian commercial attachés in neighboring countries, including Pakistan, Russia, Kazakhstan, China, Afghanistan and Iraq, to work with customs and transport authorities to develop the routes.

Use of Iran's southern ports has de-

clined because of restrictions caused by the war, and alternative routes through the Caspian Sea and by road have been considered for moving goods, Emami said.

Cargo loading and unloading at northern ports has increased by 54%, he said, adding that road routes through Pakistan and Turkey were used mainly for containerized cargo.

Emami said 73% of Iran's export cargo and 79% of its import cargo were transported by sea, making the shift of such volumes to road and rail routes difficult.

He said essential goods were being fully supplied, while some industrial and mining goods were entering the country with delays.

Iran's Southern ports remain under a US naval blockade imposed by Washington in mid-April, aimed at pressur-

ing Tehran into an agreement after a 40-day US-Israeli war that began in late February. After a pause of several weeks, the naval blockade was reinstated in mid-July. Tehran is seeking to diversify its logistics corridors to counter growing restrictions on its trade routes.

Iran's maritime transit has declined because of the naval blockade, but road transit through the country is continuing, Emami said.

The Bazargan, Bashmaq and Tamarchin border crossings are among the main entry points for transit cargo, while Dogharoun is the main exit route for transit cargo to Afghanistan, he said. Emami warned that reduced attention to the security and stability of transit routes could lead other countries to choose alternative routes in the future.

Amid Riyadh-Islamabad-Ankara ...

Can a defense agreement or regional security structure created without Iran essentially wield meaningful regional power?

Iran is undoubtedly one of the major powers in the region and must be taken into account when any kind of regional alliance or security structure is being created. However, regarding the Mecca agreement, I believe that establishing such a structure in itself faces serious challenges. The member countries are not homogeneous in terms of their political and ideological outlook or even their national interests.

Moreover, when it comes to regional security and defense cooperation, the US is above all seeking mechanisms that preserve the arms market, secure its economic interests and guarantee the transfer of energy and oil from the region.

Some member countries have suggested that Egypt and Iran could join. How do you view Iran joining the agreement?

The principle of Iran participating in regional security arrangements is in line with the policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran, because Iran has always

emphasized that regional security should be created by regional countries without the presence of extra-regional powers.

But the important issue is how the structure and command of such an alliance would be defined. One of the objectives the US pursued in the past through pacts such as CENTO, and even through counterterrorism coalitions, was to place the armed forces of regional countries within a structure under its command and control and bring them into line with its policies.

During the fight against Daesh, Iran was also asked to join the international

coalition, but it rejected the proposal because it was concerned that Iran's army and armed forces would be placed in a structure under the influence and direction of foreign powers' command. Therefore, Iran's participation in any regional arrangement must be carefully examined, and it must be clear what Iran is giving and what it is receiving in return.

If the purpose of Iran's participation in such an arrangement is to prevent the agreement from turning into an anti-Iran coalition, could Tehran's membership be the right decision?

In my view, the circumstances must be

assessed at each point in time to determine what Iran is giving and what it is receiving. But Iran is not in a position, given its military and defense capabilities, to enter just any security structure simply to neutralize a potential coalition. Even the US, with all the military capabilities and resources at its disposal, failed to achieve its objectives against Iran. Therefore, what matters is that Iran must ensure that, under the guise of a regional alliance, its capabilities and armed forces are not placed in a structure that could ultimately allow restrictions or controls to be imposed on the country's defense decisions.

Saudi Arabia's doomed gamble

Joint defense pact won't save Riyadh



By Saman Sofalgar

Political researcher

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

The joint defense agreement, signed on August 7 by Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan, is being presented as an important step toward a more autonomous regional security order. Its central provision is straightforward: an armed attack against one of the three signatories will be treated as an attack against all. On paper, that resembles collective defense. But the more consequential question is not what the agreement declares. It is whether the three governments would actually be willing — and able — to act collectively when their interests diverge.

The answer is far from obvious. The Joint Defense Pact is better understood not as the birth of a Middle Eastern NATO, but as an attempt by three very different powers to strengthen their bargaining positions in a region where established security arrangements are under growing strain. It may improve military coordination and increase political deterrence. Yet it is unlikely, by itself, to resolve the deeper security dilemmas that have encouraged Riyadh to seek additional strategic partnerships.

The comparison with NATO's Article 5 should therefore be treated with caution. Article 5 is embedded in a highly institutionalized alliance, supported by decades of integrated military planning, established command structures, interoperability, intelligence sharing, and extensive political commitments. The Joint Defense Pact is new. Its publicly available provisions do not yet establish an equivalent system for determining when collective defense is triggered, what military assistance is obligatory, or how a joint response would be organized. The distinction is important. In any alliance, credibility depends not simply on declaring that an attack on one is an attack on all, but on convincing potential rivals that the other members would actually act.

This uncertainty is particularly significant because the three countries do not share identical security priorities. Saudi Arabia is primarily concerned with protecting the kingdom and preserving its regional position. Turkey is pursuing a more autonomous foreign policy shaped by interests extending from Syria and Iraq to the Caucasus and the Eastern Mediterranean. Pakistan, meanwhile, remains heavily focused on India and security challenges along its western frontier. These different priorities could complicate collective decision-making in a major crisis.

Pakistan illustrates this challenge clearly. Islamabad has strong and longstanding defense ties with Riyadh, including a history of military cooperation and personnel deployments. But close defense relations do not necessarily

translate into an unlimited commitment to participate in every regional conflict. Pakistan must preserve strategic flexibility, manage its rivalry with India, and address serious security pressures along its western border. These constraints give Islamabad strong incentives to avoid commitments that could pull it into an open-ended conflict beyond its immediate strategic priorities. Turkey faces a different set of constraints. Ankara and Riyadh have moved significantly closer in recent years, but rapprochement should not be confused with complete strategic convergence. During the previous decade, the two countries competed for influence across parts of the Muslim world and adopted different positions on several regional issues. Their current cooperation reflects changing circumstances and overlapping interests, rather than the disappearance of all underlying differences.

Turkey's continued membership in NATO further demonstrates the multidirectional nature of its strategic policy. Ankara has made clear that cooperation with new partners does not necessarily replace its existing alliances and relationships. The Joint Defense Pact is therefore more plausibly viewed as an instrument of strategic diversification than as an alternative to the broader security system in which Turkey already operates. Ankara can deepen defense cooperation with Riyadh and Islamabad while maintaining its other strategic partnerships. This leads to the central paradox of the Joint Defense Pact. If the agreement is intended to reduce Saudi Arabia's dependence on the United States, it does not yet accomplish that objective. Saudi Arabia remains deeply integrated into a security ecosystem built around American weapons, training, intelligence, logistics, and military infrastructure. Washington may no longer provide Riyadh with the same degree of strategic reassurance it once did, but the United States remains difficult to replace. Adding new partners does not automatically produce strategic autonomy.

Saudi Arabia's enormous defense spending makes this par-



Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman is seen during an official visit to California, United States, on October 9, 2025.

● SHUTTERSTOCK

adox even more striking. The kingdom spent an estimated \$75.8 billion on its military in 2023, according to figures from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, making it the world's fifth-largest military spender that year. Yet this level of expenditure has not eliminated Riyadh's reliance on external security relationships. The underlying challenge, therefore, is not simply a shortage of military resources. It is the difficulty of converting financial power and sophisticated weapons systems into an independent and sustainable security architecture. The history of Saudi coalition-building reinforces this point. Riyadh has repeatedly sought to address strategic vulnerabilities by building partnerships with other regional and extra-regional powers. The experience of the Yemen war, however, demonstrated the limits of coalition warfare when political objectives are difficult to translate into sustainable outcomes. Military superiority alone cannot guarantee a durable political settlement, particularly in conflicts shaped by complex local dynamics.

The Joint Defense Pact could therefore reproduce some of the very dependencies it seeks to overcome. By adding new



The defense agreement between Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Pakistan reflects Riyadh's search for security beyond Washington. But strategic differences, competing regional interests, and the absence of credible collective-defense mechanisms could make the pact less a new security architecture than a fragile hedge against an increasingly uncertain Middle East.

security partners, Saudi Arabia can diversify its relationships, but diversification is not the same as independence. Turkey and Pakistan bring significant military and diplomatic capabilities to the arrangement, but they also have their own economic, political, and strategic interests. Their participation is consequently likely to remain conditional on how a particular crisis affects their own national interests.

Nor should the agreement be interpreted as the creation of a rigid regional bloc. Both Turkey and Pakistan have strong incentives to maintain broad diplomatic and economic relationships across the region. Their strategic cultures have traditionally emphasized flexibility and balancing rather than permanent alignment with a single regional camp. In a crisis, this could make mediation, diplomacy, and de-escalation more attractive options than automatic military intervention.

This may ultimately be the most important political feature of the Joint Defense Pact. It demonstrates that Saudi Arabia is seeking greater diversification in its security partnerships at a time when confidence in traditional security arrangements has become more complicated. It also reflects a wider regional trend:



Gen. Kenneth Franklin McKenzie (3rd-R), then-commander of the United States Central Command, inspects an industrial port site in Saudi Arabia.

● defenseone.com

states are increasingly seeking multiple partnerships rather than relying exclusively on a single external guarantor.

Yet diversification is not the same as a new security architecture. A genuinely regional system would require more than additional defense agreements. It would require mechanisms for crisis management, confidence-building, dialogue, and the peaceful management of disputes. Without such mechanisms, new alliances can increase the number of security commitments without necessarily addressing the sources of regional instability.

The durability of the agreement will ultimately depend on its practical mechanisms rather than the symbolism surrounding its signing. Symbolism, however important, cannot substitute for institutional credibility. Setting that aside, in recent years, Saudi Arabia's government has implemented a number of measures that have been criticized as undermining Islamic values under the banner of domestic reforms.

The ultimate test of the Joint Defense Pact will therefore come not at the signing ceremony but during the first serious crisis that challenges it. Will all three governments define a threat in the same way? Will they be prepared to bear the political and economic costs of collective action? And does the agreement contain sufficient mechanisms to prevent disagreements among its members from turning into paralysis?

For now, these questions remain unanswered. The Joint Defense Pact is significant precisely because it reflects this uncertainty. It demonstrates that the established regional security architecture is under pressure, but it does not yet demonstrate that a coherent alternative has emerged.

The temptation in periods of geopolitical change is to confuse the creation of an alliance with the creation of security. Alliances are instruments, not solutions. They can strengthen deterrence and increase bargaining power, but they can also create new obligations without resolving the underlying disputes that generate insecurity.

The Joint Defense Pact may eventually become one component of a more diversified regional security system. But its success will depend less on the number of troops, aircraft, or weapons its members can assemble than on their ability to reconcile their different strategic interests. Until then, it is best understood not as a Middle Eastern NATO, but as a cautious and potentially fragile experiment in regional security hedging — one that reflects Riyadh's search for greater strategic reassurance, but whose long-term credibility remains unproven. This issue is so serious that many now view the Joint Defense Pact as nothing more than a show rather than an action with real consequences.



US-led Middle East order over

Saudi Arabia-Pakistan-Turkey agreement proves it



By Steven A. Cook
Senior fellow at the
Council on Foreign
Relations

OPINION

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This does not diminish the Joint Defense Agreement because its importance does not lie in its security guarantees. Rather, it reflects a change underway in the Middle East's regional order — one that reduces the United States' decades-long leadership role.

Since the 1970s, the United States has nurtured and led a regional order that has included Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and (de facto) Israel. Other countries, such as Oman and Kuwait, also played unique roles in this regional architecture. These relationships made it relatively easier and less expensive for Washington to pursue its core interests in the Middle East — preventing threats to the free flow of oil, helping to ensure Israeli security, and blocking any country or combination of countries from challenging American primacy in the region.

The United States was generally successful in achieving these goals, even accounting for some notable setbacks like the Arab oil embargo in 1973 and the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, which toppled a friendly authoritarian. After the brief disruption of the global oil market and the deep recession it caused in the 1970s, oil was never effectively weaponized again, Israel's safety was largely assured, and the United States remained the guarantor of regional security. All of this would have been harder — and cost significantly more resources — without the help of Wash-



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan (L), Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (C), and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif pose after signing a joint defense agreement in Saudi Arabia on August 7, 2026.
● PPI

ington's regional partners.

The high-water mark of this regional order was perhaps 35 years ago, when the United States assembled a coalition to defend Saudi Arabia and restore Kuwait's sovereignty after Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait. More recently, the order has been under stress due to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, US support for protesters during the so-called Arab Spring, the United States' unwillingness to take significant action to overthrow the regime of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad, Washington's tepid-at-best support for Saudi Arabia's intervention in Yemen's civil war, President Donald Trump's unwillingness to come to Saudi Arabia's direct defense after Iran attacked oil facilities in the Kingdom in 2019, and Israel's campaign in the Gaza Strip after the October 7, 2023, attacks. All have placed pressure on this regional order.

After inconclusive wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the debate within the US policy community — to which Middle Eastern leaders pay close attention — centered on the questions of withdrawal and retrenchment from the region. The idea that

the Middle East was no longer important coincided with the notion that ensuring the flow of energy resources from the region was rapidly becoming a thing of the past. One version of this argument noted the significant increase in domestic oil and gas production, prompting some to suggest that a United States that no longer relied on Middle Eastern energy resources could walk away from the region. Another line of reasoning posited, rather simplistically, that protecting the region's oil fields was unnecessary as the transition to alternative energy resources proceeded. The first argument conveniently ignored the fact that the energy markets are global and threats to it in one part of the world would still affect US consumers. The second claim vastly underplayed the difficulty of decarbonizing the energy system and society more broadly. Adding to the dissonance of the 2010s was the unpredictability of the United States, which came in two related varieties. Reflecting the political polarization of the United States, significant and abrupt shifts became a theme of US policy in the region. In 2015, president Barack Obama agreed to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with Iran. His successor, Donald Trump, abrogated the nuclear agreement three years later after initially exploring ways to get back into the JCPOA. The United States promoted democracy in the region, then did not, before

trying again after the Arab uprisings, and finally giving up on it. A values-forward approach to the region then followed, but this was abandoned when president Joe Biden discovered he needed Egypt's help in Gaza in 2021 and Saudi Arabia's flexibility on oil production in 2022. Regional leaders could once count on continuity in US foreign policy, but over the last few decades, they have been forced to contend with policy based on "anything but what the previous president did," regardless of its wisdom. Trump's style of diplomacy, which relies on what his gut tells him and keeping his options open, has compounded US unpredictability. As a result, in the ongoing conflict with Iran, the United States has toggled between force, threats of force, and negotiation. Washington's regional partners often have no advance warning of Trump's twists and turns and have paid a high price in the form of Iran's willingness to target them in response to US actions. Trump's apparent impulsiveness has now left some in the region to wonder whether they will be left in the lurch to face an empowered Iran on their own. There were moments when it seemed that the old, US-led order could be strengthened



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Fast forward to today, and the Saudis, who have clearly become concerned about the reliability of the United States, are now looking for other options — i.e., the Joint Defense Agreement. It is not important that the Turks and Pakistanis are unable to bring the kind of military power to bear that the United States possesses. The Saudis and their new security partners are seeking a new order that allows them, not Washington, to shape the region.

For Pakistan and Turkey — both US partners who nevertheless chafe at the exercise of the United States' power in their parts of the world — the Joint Defense Agreement enhances their influence in the Persian Gulf at the expense of their own adversaries: India and Israel, respectively. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan also has an ideological commitment to this new security pact, given the long-standing Turkish Islamist interest in a "Muslim NATO". The Saudis and Turks have also gone further, proposing a redirection of the rail link that is part of IMEC. Instead of running from Jordan to Israel and then linking to Europe via Cyprus and Greece, goods would bypass Israel and continue from Saudi Arabia through Jordan and north to Syria and finally Turkey before being transshipped to the Europeans.

The US-aligned regional order could now become a Middle East with two blocs: the countries that remained committed to the Abraham Accords and its alternative, the Joint Defense Agreement. Previously, regional rivalries and disputes were contained because leaders prioritized their relations with the United States, which was the tie that bound the regional order. Now, with the Pakistanis, Saudis, and Turks moving forward with a vision that competes directly with the Abraham Accords, that no longer seems to be the case.

This is a major change, and it is hard to overstate its significance. After five decades, it is no longer possible to talk about a US-led order in the Middle East.

The article was first published by the Council on Foreign Relations.

US-led Middle East order over

Saudi Arabia-Pakistan-Turkey agreement proves it



By Steven A. Cook
Senior fellow at the
Council on Foreign
Relations

OPINION

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The United States was generally successful in achieving these goals, even accounting for some notable setbacks like the Arab oil embargo in 1973 and the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, which toppled a friendly authoritarian. After the brief disruption of the global oil market and the deep recession it caused in the 1970s, oil was never effectively weaponized again, Israel's safety was largely assured, and the United States remained the guarantor of regional security. All of this would have been harder — and cost significantly more resources — without the help of Wash-



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Sports Desk

A prolific campaign at the Asian Youth & Junior Weightlifting Championships in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, yielded 56 medals for Iran's boys and girls, as the country secured four podium finishes, including two historic ones in the women's competitions, in the team standings.

Farhad Qolizadeh capped the medal-laden campaign with a clean sweep of three golds, thanks to a 172kg snatch, 210kg clean & jerk and 382kg total in the men's junior 110kg category on Friday.

Taha Nemati-Moghaddam added three medals in the +110kg category later in the day as Iran finished third in a tight men's junior team race with 543 points, collecting nine golds, five silvers and three bronzes.

A triple-silver medalist at May's World Junior Championships, Nemati settled for bronze in the snatch with 173kg before posting a best lift of 219kg in the clean & jerk to claim two more silver medals.

Kazakhstan was crowned men's junior champions with 553 points, four clear of runners-up Uzbekistan.

Iran also finished third in the women's junior competition – a best-ever result for the country in the history of the championships – collecting four golds, two silvers and six bronzes for 470 points. The host nation won the team title with 558 points, with Kazakhstan runners-up on 522. Mahsa Beheshti spearheaded Iran's medal haul, winning three golds in the women's youth +77kg category on Thursday with a 113kg snatch, 148kg

Asian Youth & Junior Weightlifting Championships: Medals galore as Iran claims four team podiums



Iran's Taha Nemati makes a successful lift in the men's junior +110kg competition at the Asian Youth & Junior Weightlifting Championships in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, on Aug. 14, 2026. ● IWFIR

clean & jerk and 261kg total. The 17-year-old also struck gold in the junior 86kg category, completing a remarkable four-gold campaign. Hasti Seddiqi was Iran's other female gold medalist in the junior age group, topping the clean & jerk standings in the 69kg category with a best effort of 126kg.

Youth glory

Iran also enjoyed a highly successful campaign in the youth competitions, winning 15 golds, seven silvers and five bronzes to top the overall medal table while claiming two runner-up finishes in the team standings. Represented by 15 lifters across the men's and women's divisions,

Iran finished second in the combined team standings with 1,064 points – just three behind the host's 16-member squad – while Kazakhstan took third place with 1,057 points.

Another historic campaign for the Iranian girls saw them finish with six golds, three silvers and three bronzes.

Apart from Beheshti, Anahita Zarei and Nasim Qassemi accounted for Iran's other three gold medals in the youth women's competition, winning six medals between them in the 77kg category.

Zarei settled for bronze in the snatch but went on to win gold in the clean & jerk and total with lifts

of 126kg and 218kg, respectively. Qassemi claimed snatch gold with a successful 91kg lift before finishing runner-up to her compatriot in the clean & jerk and total with 117kg and 208kg, respectively.

In the men's division, meanwhile, Iran won nine golds, four silvers and two bronzes – the country's best medal haul in the tournament – but had to settle for second place in the team standings with 530 points, 23 behind the host nation. Kazakhstan finished third with 506 points.

Mohammad-Javad Beiranvand was in a league of his own in the 75kg category, collecting a remarkable nine gold medals, including three in the Central Asian category, across the two age groups.

The Iranian lifted 145kg in the snatch to set a new world youth record and was equally impressive in the clean & jerk, successfully lifting 180kg in his second attempt to set new Asian and world records in the clean & jerk and total.

Beiranvand capped his campaign with a 325kg total to add three more gold medals to his individual haul in Tashkent, underlining his status as one of Iran's most promising young weightlifters.

Iran's Taha Nojavan delivered further record-breaking performances, sweeping the gold medals in the youth +95kg category.

Nojavan shattered Asian and world youth records with a 176kg snatch before dominating the clean & jerk with a successful 215kg lift, which was also a new world youth record. Iran accounted for 16 of the 33 world and continental records broken during eight days of competition in the Uzbek capital.

Iran to face Russia in familiar friendly



● FFIRI

Sports Desk

Russia will host Iran in a friendly in Kazan on September 29, the Iranian Football Federation (FFIRI) announced Friday. The match will mark the third meeting between the two national teams since Amir Qalenoee was appointed to the Iran job for a second spell in March 2023. The two sides played out a 1-1 draw at Volgograd Arena in October last year.

The Russian national team has been banned from all FIFA and UEFA competitions for the past four years after Russia launched its

military operation in Ukraine in February 2022.

The upcoming match will be part of Iran's preparations for the 2027 AFC Asian Cup, which kicks off on January 7 in Saudi Arabia.

A semifinalist at the previous two editions, Iran will begin its bid for a fourth Asian Cup title – and its first since 1976 – against China in Group C, which also features Kyrgyzstan and Syria, at Riyadh's Kingdom Arena on January 9.

Iraqi media reported earlier this month that Iran will also take part in a four-team tournament alongside Iraq and Uzbekistan in Basra during the November FIFA international window, although the Iranian gov-

erning body has yet to confirm the report.

Despite FFIRI chairman Mahdi Tajiri backing Qalenoee on several occasions to remain in charge for the Asian Cup, the head coach has yet to be offered a new contract after his previous deal expired following Team Melli's mixed campaign at the FIFA World Cup in June.

Iran enjoyed a historic unbeaten run in the group stage of the expanded 48-team tournament in North America, playing out three draws against New Zealand (2-2), Belgium (0-0) and Egypt (1-1). However, Iran finished third in Group G and missed out on a first-ever spot in the knockout phase in seven World Cup appearances.

Persian Gulf Premier League: Heavyweight trio off to flying starts

Sports Desk

Three of the so-called "Big Four" in the Persian Gulf Premier League delivered statement victories on the opening day of the new Iranian top-flight season.

Esteghlal showed little sign of being affected by a FIFA transfer ban, routing newly promoted Mes Shahr-e Babak 4-0 at home.

Young striker Saied Saharkhizan got the Capital Blues off the mark right before halftime and then doubled his tally nine minutes after the break, before substitute Mohammad-Hossein Eslami and 20-year-old midfielder Esmail Qolizadeh added late strikes in the 88th and 92nd minutes, respectively, as Esteghlal celebrated the biggest opening-day victory in the history of the competition.

In Tabriz, Tractor gave head coach Javad Nekounam, who only replaced Mohammad Rabiei last week, a fitting



Esteghlal striker Saied Saharkhizan (11) celebrates his goal during a 4-0 victory over Mes Shahr-e Babak in the Persian Gulf Premier League in Tehran, Iran, on Aug. 14, 2026. ● FFIRI

start to life on the bench by defeating 10-man Paykan 2-0.

Having joined from Emirati club Ittihad Kalba in the summer, Iranian international striker Shahrar Moghanlou marked his debut in style, scoring twice in the first half.

The visitors were reduced to 10 men deep into first-half stoppage time after fullback

Nima Ahmadi was adjudged to have denied the opposition a clear goalscoring opportunity.

Tractor's victory, however, was overshadowed by an injury to prolific winger Mahdi Torabi, who was forced off just six minutes into the contest and will be a doubt for the upcoming crucial games against Sepahan and Persepolis.

Sepahan, meanwhile, secured a hard-fought 2-0 away victory at Chadormalou. Ehsan Hajsafi broke the deadlock from the spot with 14 minutes remaining, before Alireza Arta's own goal in the sixth minute of stoppage time secured all three points for Moharram Navidkia's side.

Elsewhere, new head coach Mahdi Rahmati celebrated a winning debut with Golgozar Sirjan, which defeated Nassaji Mazandaran 1-0 at home thanks to Milad Kor's 89th-minute strike.

Pirouz Qorbani also enjoyed a victorious start to his reign on the Iralco bench, as his side claimed a 2-0 win at Esteghlal Khuzestan.

Bahran Goudarzi put the visitors in front in the 11th minute, before Abbas Kahrizi found the net in the fourth minute of stoppage time. In Khorramabad, Hossein Shanai scored an 81st-minute equalizer to cancel out his teammate Masoud Mohebi's own goal midway through the first half, as Khaybar salvaged a point at home in a 1-1 draw against Fajr Sepasi.

FIBA 3x3 Youth Nations League 2026: Iran men beat Japan to win Stop 4



● FIBA

Sports Desk

Iran's men's team capped off the fourth stop of the FIBA 3x3 Youth Nations League 2026 in style, securing three successive victories in the Asia Central/East division in Cangzhou, China, on Friday. Comprising Mohammad-Mahdi Rahimi, Seyyed

Mohammad Ghaffari, Mohammad-Basir Mo'meni, Sarem Jafari and Argen Minasians, the Iranian team began the day with a 21-15 victory over Mongolia before beating Kazakhstan 21-13 to finish atop Pool A and set up a final against Japan.

An emphatic 21-10 victory over Japan in the final completed a perfect run for Iran, which had settled for a runner-up finish behind South Korea at Stop 1 before finishing third at Stop 3 on Thursday.

Iran seeks global recognition for its historic water heritage

Iranica Desk

A member of the Iranian National Committee on Irrigation and Drainage (IRNCID) has outlined the process for nominating Iran's historic water heritage for inclusion on the World Heritage Irrigation Structures (WHIS) list, highlighting the country's extensive potential in the field.

Mohammad Hassanli said more than 2,000 historic sites associated with water management and use have been identified across Iran. However, as each country can nominate only four sites a year, identifying, documenting and prioritizing this heritage is essential for stronger international representation, according to chn.ir.

Referring to the international standing of Iran's historic water structures, he said each country may submit four eligible sites annually to the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage (ICID) for review and evaluation by its Committee on Irrigation and Drainage.

Following assessment, selected sites are presented at the ICID's annual meeting and at the WHIS awards ceremony. The process not only provides international recognition for historic water-engineering heritage but can also help highlight Iran's lesser-known historical and tourism potential.

Hassanli said 12 Iranian sites have so far been included in the WHIS list. They include the Abbasabad Complex in Behshahr of Mazandaran Province, Baladeh Qanat



Shushtar Historical Hydraulic System
● alibaba.ir

and Kurit Dam in South Khorasan Province, Fariman Dam in Khorasan Razavi Province, Fazlali Khan Qanat in Qazvin Province, Moon Qanat in Isfahan Province, Naseri Canyon in Fars Province, Qaleh Hatam Bridge and Gerdab-e Sangi in Lorestan Province, Qasemabad Qanat in Hamedan Province, Shushtar Historical Hydraulic System in Khuzestan Province and Zarch Qanat in Yazd Province.

He said the preparation of nomination dossiers is undertaken by the youth section of the Iranian National Committee on Irrigation and Drainage. After review and approval by the committee's executive board, the dossiers are submitted to ICID for evaluation. Regarding the sites nominated in



Zarch Qanat
● alibaba.ir

2026, Hassanli said four Iranian historic water structures were submitted and accepted for review despite difficulties caused by internet disruptions during the submission process. They

are the Siraf water structures in Bushehr Province, Shadorvan Bridge, also known as the Band-e Qeysar Bridge, in Khuzestan Province, Si-o-se-Pol Bridge in Isfahan Province, and Band-e Amir, a natu-

rally formed group of lakes, in Fars Province.

He stressed that the international designation goes beyond symbolic recognition, saying that international listings and awards can have significant economic and social benefits. With proper planning, he added, they could contribute to heritage tourism and the development of local communities.

Hassanli cited Fazlali Khan Qanat as a notable example. Located in Radkan village in Takestan, Qazvin Province, the qanat is approximately 30 kilometers long and features a distinctive cross-brick construction technique. It is considered an important example of Iran's technical knowledge and

architecture in underground water structures, and may date back to the Parthian period.

Fazlali Khan Qanat received the World Irrigation and Drainage Prize in Bali, Indonesia, in 2019 and was added to Iran's National Heritage List two years later, in 2021.

The example, Hassanli said, shows how international recognition of a historic site can complement national registration and conservation efforts. With a well-planned tourism program, such recognition can also help boost the local economy and create opportunities for restoration and preservation.

He emphasized that inclusion of historic water structures on the WHIS list is different from inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List and that the two systems should not be considered equivalent.

Explaining ICID's eligibility criteria, Hassanli said proposed sites must be more than 100 years old and fall into one of the designated categories. These include dams primarily used for irrigation, water-storage and diversion structures, waterways, and sites or structures historically or currently associated with agricultural water management.

According to the country's National Heritage List, more than 2,000 structures with characteristics associated with historic water infrastructure exist across Iran, while only four can be submitted to ICID each year.

He said the limitation highlights the need for a comprehensive program to identify, document, assess and prioritize the country's historic water structures. The selection process, he added, should not be based solely on age but should also take into account historical, technical, architectural, social, environmental and tourism considerations.

Fars set to launch new tourism platform

Iranica Desk

The director general of Fars Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization has announced the imminent launch of a tourism platform for the province, saying the new platform will help tourists discover diverse and sometimes lesser-known routes across six areas of tourism: historical, natural, cultural, religious, health and sports.

Behzad Moridi said the Fars tourism platform is ready and will likely be made available to the public in early September once several technical issues are resolved, according to IRNA.

introduced to the public," Moridi said.

He explained that the cultural tourism section includes literary, artistic, event, food and clothing tourism, reflecting an anthropological and ethnographic approach. It introduces numerous routes in Shiraz and other cities across Fars and provides visitors with guidance on how to explore them.

The historical tourism section, he added, guides tourists to historical sites and routes across the province, including the Achaemenid Route, Sassanid Route and Southern Civilization Route.

The section also includes museum tours and historic-fabric tours,

been mapped.

"We are currently defining multiple routes that would be worthy of and befitting the name of Fars and Shiraz," he added.

Commenting on a proposal to select Hafezieh and Sa'dieh in Shiraz as pilot sites for board-based management of heritage attractions, Moridi said he wanted to offer "an internal critique within the discourse."

He said public and multifaceted participation is inherently valuable and that association-based and council-style management can, by its nature, contribute to development.

"However, as many experts have emphasized, it is the way this work is carried out that raises concerns," he said. "Many of the problems that previously existed in association-based and board-of-trustee structures could become challenging if the implementation of this approach is accelerated."

The official said tourism in Shiraz could move beyond merely a verbal interpretation or even a lived experience toward a deeper search for meaning.

"Few people have visited Shiraz without experiencing the city or walking through Hafezieh, Sa'dieh, the holy shrine of Shah Cheragh or Eram Garden," Moridi said. "But with the help of the media, the city can also unlock other layers of tourism."

"Our tourism approach is moving toward meaning-oriented tourism and, subsequently, toward transcendence," he said. "No robot will ever be capable of accessing or experiencing this layer of tourism."

with multiple routes mapped for exploring the historic districts of Shiraz and other cities in Fars.

Referring to the status of Fars Province and Shiraz as the third major shrine destination of the Ahl al-Bayt in Iran's religious tourism, Moridi said pilgrimage routes to revered Imamzadehs have also



Hafezieh
● alibaba.ir

He said the platform is different from similar services previously available, adding that its main mission is to define multiple tourism routes and corridors across the six sectors.

"These six areas have been expanded, and within each one, multiple tourism routes have been

Traditional weaving preserves centuries-old craft in Ilam

Iranica Desk

Moj, a traditional handwoven textile featuring large checkered and geometric patterns, is made from hand-spun wool produced by nomadic communities and villagers in western Iran.



● visitiran.ir

Farzad Sharifi, director general of Ilam Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Organization, described Moj Bafi as one of the most authentic handicrafts of the Kurdish regions of western Iran, saying the centuries-old craft has long been intertwined with the lives of nomadic and rural communities in the area. Speaking to ISNA, Sharifi said Moj is a handwoven textile with large checkered and geometric designs, with both its warp and weft made entirely from hand-spun wool. The textile is

woven on a traditional loom and is commonly produced in navy blue, dark blue, yellow and red.

He explained that Moj Bafi workshops generally produce two types of products. The first is the Janamaz, or prayer rug, which is typically woven at around 100 by 150

centimeters. The second is Moj, which is usually made to order and consists of four panels, each measuring two meters in length. Their width varies from 45 to 75 centimeters depending on the thickness of the yarn. Describing the history of Moj Bafi, Sharifi said that in the past, among self-sufficient nomadic and rural families in the region, making these traditional bed coverings was an important household activity during periods of leisure and gradually developed into a form of domestic industry and

art. Wool was readily available because of the region's livestock-based economy, while the weaving loom was simple and primitive in design. He added that weaving generally takes place throughout the year, although activity intensifies from late spring through early winter. The greater the number of motifs incorporated into a Moj, the more shuttles are required during the weaving process, making the work more time-consuming and labor-intensive.

Sharifi said the quality of Moj is traditionally assessed by the number of shuttles used simultaneously in the weaving process. The greater the number of shuttles, he explained, the fuller and more intricate the design, and consequently the higher the artistic value and quality of the finished piece.

He noted that Moj Bafi has undergone changes in recent years as Moj textiles have increasingly taken on a decorative rather than purely functional role. These changes have affected their size, shape, raw materials and patterns.

In Moj Bafi terminology, each color used in a design is associated with a shuttle, while each point where different colors intersect is also counted as a shuttle.



Restoration begins on historic Abbasi Mosque after war damage

Arts & Culture Desk

Restoration of the tilework and reinforcement of the stone base of the historic Abbasi Mosque in Iran's central city of Isfahan have begun after damage caused by explosions during a 40-day war, a heritage official told IRNA on Saturday.

Javad Rahmati, head of the Naqsh-e Jahan World Heritage Site office, said the repair followed damage to the mosque during the war, which began in late February with US and Israeli strikes on Iran.

Some of the tiles had already been damaged before the war, while others were affected by air pressure from explosions during the conflict. "After those explosions, we saw the gradual collapse of tiles in the following days and weeks," Rahmati said. A restoration contract has been signed and work has begun, with crews first removing damaged tiles in areas that suffered the most severe deterioration

and are at risk of falling. Tile restoration is being carried out alongside work on the stone base because the greatest damage has occurred at the boundary between the two.

Rahmati said erosion of materials, moisture penetration and the passage of time had caused some tiles to separate from their base, shifting their weight onto the stonework below. In some places, the stones have moved 5 to 7 cm out of position and are at risk of falling.

About IRR80bn has been allocated to the project, of which around IRR28bn has so far been received. Part of the funding is being provided by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, while another portion is coming through market insurance contributions to cultural heritage.

A separate contract is also being arranged with the University of Isfahan to study war-related damage, geology and vibrations affecting the historic structure.

The restoration is part of a three-way agreement between Isfahan provincial authorities, the provincial Cultural Heritage Department and the private sector to repair historic sites damaged in the conflict, including the Abbasi Mosque.

The first phase has secured IRR80bn in private-sector funding for emergency restoration, focusing on the mosque's 400-year-old tiles and areas damaged by blast waves.

Tiles on parts of the mosque's northern and western iwans fell after an attack on March 8 on a street near Naqsh-e Jahan Square. Other historic buildings around the square were also damaged by the blasts.

Further damage was reported after the bombing of the Isfahan provincial government building in the Safavid Government House area, affecting the square's Grade 2 protected zone and the Grade 1 protected zone of Chehel Sotoun Palace.

Built during the Safavid era,



the Abbasi Mosque is one of the landmark monuments of Isfahan's Naqsh-e Jahan Square

and is internationally known for its elaborate architectural decoration. The mosque and

Naqsh-e Jahan Square were added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1980.

Iran calls for release of pilots captured in Qatar during US-Israeli aggression

Social Desk

An Iranian military official on Saturday called for the release of three pilots he said were captured in Qatar during an air strike on an American base in the tiny Persian Gulf country days after the US and Israel launched a war of aggression against Iran.

"Three Iranian pilots were captured alive by Qatari forces after their Su-24 fighter jets crashed during the war," General Mohammad Baqerzadeh of the Iranian Armed Forces said, ISNA reported.

"Javad Salehi, Abdolmajid Dashi, and Omran Behraveshtian have been held by Qatari forces for six months," he added in a letter addressed to the International Committee of the Red Cross. In the letter, Baqerzadeh noted that the pilots had not been allowed to meet or contact



The combo shows three Iranian pilots which Iran says are alive and held in Qatar following a raid on a US military base in Qatar in early March.

● kalanshahr.ir

their families.

Last month, the Army said it had retrieved the body of Iranian pilot Majid Kazemi, who was killed during an attack on Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar in early March.

Iran had previously said the other pilots were missing but news of their capture was not publicized at the time.

The Al Udeid base in Qatar includes forward components of US Central Command (CENTCOM), as well as the command's air forces and special operations forces, according to AFP.

It is the largest US base in the

region.

The war broke out on February 28, when the United States and Israel launched strikes on Iran, which retaliated with attacks across the region on US bases as well as on Israel.

Diplomatic efforts led to an April ceasefire, ending nearly 40 days of fighting, before the signing of a framework for peace talks in June, which later collapsed.

Iran and the United States have since traded fire sporadically, with fighting mainly centered in southern Iran and around the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

A lull in fighting has been in place since late July.

Rahbari to conduct leading composers works at Russia's Mariinsky Theater

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian composer and conductor Ali Rahbari will take the stage at Russia's Mariinsky Theater in St Petersburg on September 25, opening his sixth artistic season at the historic opera house. Rahbari will conduct works by some of the world's leading composers, including Wagner, Grieg and Berlioz, IRNA reported on Saturday.

Appointed "permanent guest conductor" of the Mariinsky Orchestra by Valery Gergiev, the legendary Russian conductor, Rahbari has won strong support from audiences and critics over his first five



seasons, conducting 28 varied programs.

During that period, he has brought to the stage a wide range of major works from the Western classical repertoire as well as prominent Iranian compositions.

One of the highlights of his work at the Mariinsky has been his efforts

to introduce Iranian musicians and music to international audiences.

Rahbari, a musician, composer and international orchestra conductor, was born in Tehran in 1948. He has previously served as permanent guest conductor of orchestras including the Belgian Radio and Television Philharmonic, Czech Philharmonic and Belgrade Philharmonic. Gergiev first invited him to the Mariinsky during the 2021-22 artistic season to conduct two works by renowned Russian composers. Following those performances, Rahbari was immediately appointed permanent guest conductor of the institution.

Iranian animation 'The Last Deer' tells silent story of loneliness of species' final survivor

Arts & Culture Desk

An Iranian animated film, The Last Deer, directed by Mehdi Barzadegan, tells the story of the final survivor of a species, a deer that escapes hunters to reach its family, only to find them dead and eventually stop running, allowing itself to be hunted.

The six-minute film, which has recently been selected for the International Festival of Animation Films Animaevka-2026 in Belarus, uses no dialogue. Instead, the story unfolds through the reactions of its sole character, the deer.

Barzadegan told IRNA on Saturday the idea for the film came from a three-second student animation about the death of a soldier as the "last person". He later turned the idea into a story about a deer and named the project The Last Deer.

The director said the animal's loneliness was central to the film. He sought to convey it through distant shots of an empty forest. At first, the deer has a strong connection with its surroundings, but once it begins to flee, the forest becomes frightening and unsafe, eventually causing it to lose its way home.

One of the biggest challenges was conveying the deer's emotions without dialogue. "Without a word being spoken and without even showing the hunters or their dogs, I had to tell everything through the deer's reactions. Our animation has only one character, and that is The



Last Deer," Barzadegan said.

The film was initially planned as a 30-second animation consisting of five or six scenes. It was later developed into an animated documentary following a proposal by Iran's Center for the Development of Documentary, Experimental and Animation Cinema. The unspecified forest was turned into a forest in Iran, while the deer was given a more defined identity. Barzadegan said he drew on documentary filmmaking techniques, where camera crews generally keep their distance from animals.

"In documentaries, the cameraman cannot get too close to animals, so shots are usually recorded from a distance. I brought this feature into the animation and used many long shots," the filmmaker said.

He also sought to recreate camera movement, camera shake, filming errors, focus shifts and motion blur. Barzadegan simulated camera lenses and, in some scenes, intensified the light, overexposed parts of the image and painted other sections black from the outset to reproduce

these visual characteristics.

Studying light behavior was among the hardest parts of the project, he said, requiring extensive trial and error to portray different times of day and night.

The animation was produced frame by frame using digital painting. Production took about a month and a half.

Barzadegan said the film's main strength lay in its technical and visual direction.

"The trump card or the most important feature of this film is mostly in the technical and visual direction. No ready-made effects were used in this animation and everything was designed. If something was supposed to be blurred, it was painted blurred from the beginning, and if something was supposed to burn in the light, it was drawn that way from the outset," he said.

The director said the film has recently entered the festival circuit and secured a place at Animaevka in Belarus. The bitter emotions running through the film, he said, have come across effectively and are among The Last Deer's strengths.