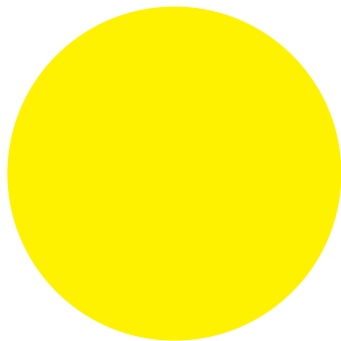


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Calculus of risk

By Sajad Abedi

Political affairs expert

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

The current geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, specifically the maritime corridors of the Persian Gulf and the Bab al-Mandab Strait, has evolved into a complex theater of “hybrid deterrence.” The decision by the Trump administration to engage in high-risk military operations in this region—despite the sophisticated military disposition of Iran in the south and the asymmetric capabilities of the Houthis forces in Yemen—is not a product of tactical oversight, but rather a calculated strategic gamble based on three primary pillars: the restoration of “Maximum Pressure,” the disruption of the “Axis of Resistance” maritime synergy, and the necessity of signaling credibility to global allies.

Challenge of ‘southern arc’

To understand the risk, one must first acknowledge the operational reality. Iran has successfully transitioned from a traditional coastal defense to a “distributed maritime strategy.” By utilizing swarms of fast-attack craft, advanced anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCMs), and an integrated network of drones, Iran has created a “no-go zone” that threatens the free flow of oil. Simultaneously, the Houthis in Yemen have transformed the Bab al-Mandab Strait into a strategic chokepoint. Their ability to employ long-range drones and ballistic missiles against commercial and military shipping has effectively extended Iran’s operational reach from the Gulf of Oman to the Red Sea, creating a coordinated “maritime pincer” that challenges U.S. naval hegemony.

Why engage now? Logic of ‘preemptive escalation’

Given these risks, why would Trump opt for a high-stakes intervention? The answer lies in the philosophy of “Peace through Strength.” In the eyes of the Trump administration, the perceived “success” of the Houthi-Iranian axis in disrupting global trade is a symptom of perceived U.S. hesitation.

Pezeshkian calls for global action on war-related environmental damage

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President Masoud Pezeshkian (Front C) poses for a family photo with world leaders at the 17th Summit of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Yerevan, Armenia, on October 16, 2026. president.ir



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Pezeshkian calls for global action on war-related environmental damage

International Desk

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian called on the international community to ensure that countries facing sanctions or military aggression are not left to shoulder the environmental costs of war and economic restrictions alone.

Addressing the leaders' summit of the 17th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP17) in Yerevan, Armenia, on Friday, Pezeshkian condemned the devastating impact of wars of aggression on nature, describing such destruction as "ecocide, or environmental genocide," the president's official website reported.

He urged the international community to establish effective, transparent and enforceable mechanisms to protect natural heritage and biodiversity during wartime. "No country should regard nature as a silent and defenseless victim of war," he said.

Pezeshkian stressed that Iran remained committed to implementing the Convention on Biological Diversity and achieving global nature conservation goals. However, he said the country needed genuine international cooperation to carry out environmental programs and repair the damage inflicted on its ecosystems.

He pointed to the multiple challenges facing Iran,

including climate change, drought, water scarcity, desertification and dwindling natural resources on the one side, and the impact of economic sanctions and restrictions on access to technology and financial resources on the other.

Iran has also been targeted in two consecutive years by criminal wars involving the extensive use of destructive and prohibited weapons, he stressed, citing attacks on fuel storage facilities in the capital as an example.

Pezeshkian called on United Nations agencies, international financial institutions and relevant environmental and sustainable development organizations to strengthen mechanisms for mobilizing financial resources, assessing environmental damage, restoring damaged ecosystems and supporting countries affected by the environmental consequences of armed conflicts.

"Saving the planet and protecting the environment requires a range of solutions that would not impose additional burdens on developing countries but would instead provide them with the resources and opportunities needed to pursue sustainable development while safeguarding nature," he said.

Pezeshkian also described biodiversity conservation as a potential pillar of "peace diplomacy," arguing that environmental cooperation



President Masoud Pezeshkian addresses the 17th Summit of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Yerevan, Armenia, on October 16, 2026.

could help bridge differences between nations.

Closer ties with neighbors On the sidelines of the COP17 leaders' summit, Pezeshkian also held talks with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze, emphasizing the need to strengthen regional cooperation and expand bilateral ties.

In his meeting with Pashinyan, the Iranian president called for a long-term strategic plan to deepen cooperation between the two countries in mining, trade, economic affairs, tourism and culture.

Developing such a plan, he said, could strengthen bilateral relations across various sectors and contribute

to regional stability and security.

Referring to US pressure aimed at restricting Iran's international trade, Pezeshkian said Iran could not be isolated through sanctions and would continue to maintain strong ties with the world by relying on its people and coordinating with neighboring countries. Pashinyan, for his part, said Armenia sought stability and peace in the region and was steadily expanding its relations with neighboring countries, with an emphasis on mutually beneficial development.

In his meeting with Kobakhidze, Pezeshkian likewise stressed the need to translate bilateral relations into practical cooperation,

saying the two countries should develop an action plan with a clear timetable. He described US sanctions against Iran as inhumane, unjustifiable and beyond the bounds of humanitarian principles.

Kobakhidze said Georgia's position on relations with neighboring countries was clear and that his country opposed any foreign interference in the internal affairs of other states.

"Our principles are friendship and cooperation between the two countries. We hope that, through cooperation between our foreign ministers and diplomatic services, we can reach common ground in the fields of economic affairs and tourism," he said.

Leader urges greater support for Iran's nursing community



International Desk

Iran's Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei called on health officials to give greater attention to Iran's nursing community, highlighting nurses' vital role in restoring health, instilling hope and safeguarding society's physical and mental well-being.

In a message marking the birth anniversary of Hazrat Zeinab (PBUH) and National Nurses Day on October 16, the Leader said the occasion had rightly been designated as a tribute to nurses, noting that many of Hazrat Zeinab's moral qualities and human values were reflected in the dedicated and valued nursing profession.

"The role of nurses, like that of certain other groups such as physicians, teachers and educators, clerics, and relief workers, is one of restoring life and inspiring hope. For this reason, nurses are sometimes regarded as angels of mercy," he said. Ayatollah Khamenei stressed that caring for patients requires nurses to maintain a continuous, attentive and patient presence. He said their contribution extended beyond treating physical ailments, helping ease psychological and emotional suffering and, in many cases, preventing despair from taking hold.

"At a time when the malevolent network of global arrogance seeks to inflict suffering on the great Iranian nation by imposing various restrictions on medical treatment and medicine, attention to nurses, strengthening the nursing community, and preserving and enhancing their knowledge, skills, capabilities, morale, motivation and dignity play an important role in safeguarding society's physical and mental health and security," he said. The Leader added that health officials were expected to make these priorities central to their work, in keeping with their ongoing commitment to serving the public.

IRGC chief hails wrestling triumph as testament to Iran's champion-building tradition

International Desk

Commander-in-Chief of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Ahmad Vahidi hailed Iran's U23 Greco-Roman wrestling team for winning the 2026 World Championships in Las Vegas, describing the achievement as a testament to the country's ability to produce champions who bring honor to Iran on any stage and arena.

In a congratulatory message, Vahidi said the team's emphatic victory, secured on US soil, demonstrated the capabilities, faith and determination of the country's young athletes, particularly in a country where Iran's adversaries have long



Ahmad Vahidi

sought to diminish the country's name and the flag of the Islamic Republic. He described the triumph as clear evidence of the enduring truth that Iran is a land that nurtures champions who raise the country's name to the highest levels

of achievement in every field.

Vahidi said the team's continued success was undoubtedly the result of scientific management, targeted planning, the commitment of coaches and technical staff, and the determination and perseverance of young athletes who, through confidence in their own abilities, had turned the rigors of training and the challenges of competition into a source of national pride.

"Our champions let their strength and merit speak for themselves on the mat and proved that Iran's name shines on the world stage through the effort, dignity and determination of its children," he said.

FM: Iran trusts Armenia to protect its interests over TRIPP

International Desk

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Tehran trusts Armenia to safeguard Iran's security interests regarding the proposed transit corridor known as the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP), which is meant to link mainland Azerbaijan to its Nakhchivan exclave through Armenian territory, Armenpress reported.

TRIPP was a US-brokered framework aimed at advancing peace and connectivity in the South Caucasus, but has drawn Tehran's attention because of its potential implications for regional geopolitics, the presence of the United States near Iran's borders, and the balance of regional influence.

Iran has consistently stressed the need to preserve national sovereignty, territorial integrity and established borders in the region, warning against arrangements that could undermine its security interests. Asked at a press briefing in Yerevan on the sidelines of the leaders' summit of the 17th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP17) whether Iran remained concerned about TRIPP and the US presence in the



Abbas Araghchi

region, Araghchi said Tehran was maintaining close contact with Armenian officials.

"We have concerns about any US presence in the region and around us. But on this issue, we are in direct contact with our Armenian friends. We trust them, and we know that they will do nothing against Iran's security," he said.

Araghchi added that consultations with the Armenian authorities were continuing, pointing to recent high-level exchanges between the two countries.

"My good friend, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan, was in Tehran, and we had good consultations. Today, our president will meet with the Armenian prime minister, perhaps for the second time in two weeks. So, we are in close contact," he said.



Brief Notice of International Tender No.1116404 First Announcement

It is hereby notified that **Esfahan Steel Company (ESCO)** intends to purchase 1,800 Ton Granulated Graphite as per the required conditions and technical specifications through two-stage international Tender. Accordingly, all the prospective bidders are kindly requested to visit ESCO's website www.esfahansteel.ir so as to obtain the tender document and upload their techno-commercial offer to ESCO's website (through Sourcing Field) no later than 09.November.2026.

It is evident that this letter is only for notification purpose.

Yours Respectfully, M. Shateri,
Goods & Equipment Purchasing Management
Esfahan Steel Company

CBI urges IMF to take realistic approach to Iran's economy



Economy Desk

Governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) Abdolnaser Hemmati urged the International Monetary Fund to adopt a realistic and professional approach to its economic assessments, free from external pressure, and to fully reflect

the impact of restrictions and geopolitical shocks on regional economies. Hemmati made the remarks on Friday during a meeting with Jihad Azour, director of the IMF's Middle East and Central Asia Department, on the sidelines of the fund's annual meetings in Bangkok, Thailand, according to the

IRNA. The two officials discussed the latest macroeconomic developments in the region and the growth outlook for countries across the Middle East and Central Asia. The CBI head called on the IMF to carefully account for the effects of



Governor of the Central Bank of Iran Abdolnaser Hemmati (2nd L) meets Director of the Middle East and Central Asia Department at IMF Jihad Azour (1st R) on the sidelines of the fund's annual meetings in Bangkok, Thailand, on October 16, 2026.

● IRNA

restrictions, geopolitical shocks, and obstacles to international trade and payments in its periodic reports. He also stressed the need to pursue Iran's legal entitlements within the fund, including access to technical and credit facilities and Special Drawing Rights (SDRs). Azour presented the department's latest assessments of the challenges facing emerging-market economies and the wider region. He emphasized the continuation of dialogue and the expansion of technical cooperation between the IMF and Iran's central bank. Since late February, when a US-Israeli coalition launched a 40-day war, Iran has been operating under wartime conditions as well as a maritime blockade from the south. The naval restriction aims to reduce Iran's oil exports to zero and drain state coffers. Iran, already under decades of Western sanctions over its nuclear activities, has also been

hit by a new round of US sanctions targeting its aviation sector. The country's national currency has fallen to record lows in recent weeks, with the US dollar trading at more than 2.5 million rials on the open market. At an IMF meeting in Bangkok on Wednesday, Hemmati said Iran's economy had shown strong resilience despite the US-Israeli war and Washington's maximum-pressure campaign, dismissing claims that the economy was on the verge of collapse. He said the central bank had played an important role in maintaining economic stability by supplying foreign currency for essential goods and medicines and helping curb accelerating inflation despite US sanctions and economic pressure. Separately, Hemmati met with Iraqi Central Bank Governor Nizar Nasser Hussein on the sidelines of the IMF annual meetings. The two discussed ways to develop and strengthen bilateral ties. Hemmati stressed the need to expand joint monetary and banking cooperation between the two countries and said Iran's banking system was ready to share its experience in the banking sector.

Gov't to stop gasoline import for next five months: Veep

Economy Desk

The government will halt importing gasoline for the five months to March 20 when the current Persian calendar year comes to an end, First Vice President Mohammad Reza Aref said on Thursday. Aref said the decision followed a policy that persuaded the public to accept higher gasoline prices, IRNA reported. "The money saved by halting imports would fund subsidies and the government's electronic food voucher program," he said. Meanwhile, an aide to the first vice president said gasoline imports would stop on October 23.



● IRNA

Abbas Pazouki, deputy for communications and information at Aref's office, also quoted President Masoud Pezeshkian as saying the government had paid between \$2 billion and \$3 billion on gasoline imports since the start of the current Persian year on March 21. Iran has spent at least \$3bn a year on gasoline imports for several years to overcome a domestic

shortfall. This year, the government also had to draw on strategic gasoline reserves to meet growing demand. Iranian refineries crank out about 110 million liters of gasoline a day, against average daily consumption of 135 million liters. To narrow the gap, the Oil Ministry ordered several petrochemical plants to allocate part of their capacity to gasoline

production. The move added 20 million liters to daily output, taking total production to 130 million liters. In early September, the government raised prices for gasoline bought outside monthly quotas for the second time in less than a year. It also adjusted monthly quotas. Gasoline is sold at three rates. Each vehicle receives 60 liters a month at 15,000 rials per liter, followed by another 50 liters at 30,000 rials. Additional purchases are unrestricted but cost 100,000 rials per liter. Drivers must use government-issued fuel cards to fill up at gas stations. Monthly quotas are loaded onto the cards.

Iran calls for removal of transport barriers at ECO meeting



Economy Desk

Iran's transport minister Farzaneh Sadeq called for removing border barriers, expanding rail and road links, protecting civilian infrastructure and setting clear timelines for implementing transport agreements among member states of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). Sadeq outlined Iran's proposals at the 14th meeting of ECO transport ministers in Kazakhstan on Thursday, according to Iran's state broadcaster IRIB. She said developing road, rail and maritime links would boost trade and strengthen economic ties among member states, given the region's geographic position. She called for reviewing the implementation of decisions made at previous meetings and identifying obstacles to cooperation. She also stressed the shared interest of member states in protecting civilian infrastructure and maintaining the movement of goods along regional routes. Sadeq proposed that the ECO Secretariat assess the impact of security disruptions on transport networks and recommend measures to improve their resilience.

Other Iranian proposals included reducing truck waiting times at border crossings, streamlining customs procedures, harmonizing transport documents and improving information sharing among border authorities. On rail cooperation, Sadeq cited the resumption of the ECO train service along the Turkey-Iran-Turkmenistan route as an opportunity to expand regional links. She said bridges damaged during the US-Israeli war, in which Iranian infrastructure was targeted, were repaired by Iranian engineers within 72 hours, allowing the route to reopen. Iran has remained on a war footing since a US-Israeli coalition launched attacks on the country in late February, targeting civilians and infrastructure during a 40-day conflict. Attacks on Iranian infrastructure resumed for a brief period on July 11, following a ceasefire that had lasted several weeks and attacks on three vessels in the Strait of Hormuz. Sadeq also highlighted a potential rail connection linking Almaty, Tehran and Istanbul as a way to expand trade and improve regional countries' access to one another's markets. She called for addressing tariff,



Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadeq attends the 14th meeting of ECO transport ministers in Kazakhstan on Oct. 15, 2026.

● IRIB

customs and technical barriers and establishing a coordinated mechanism to facilitate train movements and ensure regular rail services. Sadeq described the southeastern port of Chabahar and its connection to Iran's national rail network as important assets for landlocked countries seeking access to open waters. Linking ports with road and rail networks and logistics services, she said, could diversify trade routes and reduce transport costs. She called for a joint plan to develop road, rail and multi-modal transport, with clear responsibilities for each country and specific implementation deadlines. She also stressed the need for a comprehensive report on progress in implementing previous agreements and the obstacles that remain. Implementing ECO transport agreements could boost trade and economic growth, strengthen regional connectivity and improve supply chain resilience, she said.

South Pars Phase 14 refinery rebuild reaches 80% completion

Economy Desk

Reconstruction of Iran's South Pars Phase 14 refinery, damaged in the war last June, is now about 80% complete, and the facility is expected to return to full capacity this year, Touraj Dehqani, CEO of Pars Oil and Gas Company, said on Friday. "Once the reconstruction is complete, the refinery will be operating at full capacity this year," Dehqani said during a visit to the refinery on Friday, according to IRNA. He said progress had been achieved through the mobilization of personnel and resources, effective planning, cooperation between the project owner and contractors, and sustained work. Dehqani said reconstruction of the last damaged section was also underway. Given the progress made and plans for the coming period, he said, the company hoped to restore the remaining gas processing train and bring Phase 14 back to full



● IRNA

capacity this year to support the country's gas supply. The refinery was damaged during the 12-day Israeli war against Iran in June 2025, Dehqani said. Pars Oil and Gas Company has also drawn on its experience rebuilding the Phase 14 refinery to guide restoration work at the third and fifth South Pars refineries, which were damaged during the more recent US-Israeli war, he added. Iran has completed major repairs at the South Pars gas field, restoring damaged production capacity following attacks during the 40-day US-Israeli war that began on Feb. 28, the country's acting oil

minister, Hamid Bovard, announced on Tuesday. During a visit to the Fourth South Pars Refinery, Bovard said Iran was accelerating repairs at damaged South Pars refineries, adding that restoring lost gas capacity to the national grid was a top priority before winter. Attacks on four South Pars gas refineries in March reduced gas production capacity by about 230 million cubic meters. Former oil minister Mohsen Paknejad said in late September that the shutdown of the four refineries had resulted in the loss of about 230 million cubic meters of gas processing capacity. Efforts to use spare capacity at other refineries had enabled Iran to recover nearly 100 million cubic meters of that loss, he said at the time. According to the Oil Ministry, Iran has restored about 50% of the gas production capacity damaged at the South Pars field during the 40-day US-Israeli war.

CIA report warns Israel could head toward civil war, total collapse



By Aída Chávez
Journalist

L E A K

Israel is at risk of civil war or state collapse, a classified CIA assessment warns, as years of genocide in Gaza and war in Lebanon and Iran deepen political, economic, and social fractures within the country.

The August report, titled "Fracture From Within," was compiled by experts in the CIA's Red Cell, according to two US sources who described the contents of the report to Drop Site News. The Red Cell, which is the unit responsible for providing "alternative analysis" within the agency, produced the assessment through a combination of open-source information and US intelligence. The assessment appears to refer only to Israel's Jewish citizens and does not consider its Palestinian citizens, who make up approximately 20% of Israel's population and who live under various forms of discrimination that Amnesty International and other human rights groups have labeled as part of a broader system of apartheid. The CIA did not respond to a request for comment.

CIA experts pointed to a volatile mix of pressures converging ahead of Israel's elections on October 27: economic crisis and soaring military spending; heavily armed veterans returning from prolonged combat, many carrying serious psychological trauma; growing fury over ultra-Orthodox men who are exempt from military service; escalating settler violence in the occupied West Bank; and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu fighting to hold onto power and igniting a constitutional crisis. The CIA's "red teams" are tasked with developing analysis and ideas that challenge prevailing assumptions and expose groupthink or blind spots that can take hold within the intelligence apparatus. "The writers of this are Israel experts," a source in the intelligence community noted, "this isn't a fantastical what if — with the upcoming election and the fissures in Israel, we should take seriously their conclusion that Israel is one spark away from real internal conflict."

One of the deepest fractures in Israeli politics has emerged not over opposition to the country's war crimes — but over who is expected to fight and who is exempt. Ultra-Orthodox men have historically received broad exemptions from military service while continuing to receive state benefits, an arrangement that has become increasingly contentious amid repeated reserve mobilizations. Their collective refusal to serve is not rooted in opposition to Israel's wars, as ultra-Orthodox leaders argue that military service threatens religious life and their obligation to Torah study. But after years in which reservists have been repeatedly called away from their jobs and families, the exemption has become a potent source of resentment in Israeli society. Households have also been absorbing the costs of Israel's belligerent policies. Food



An Israeli soldier stands guard as young men gather during a demonstration by Ultra-Orthodox Jews against Israel's military draft on June 17, 2026, outside the Beit Lid military base.

● AMIR LEVY/GETTY IMAGES

prices have reached record highs, with the cost of food — including fresh fruit and vegetables — rising 9.5 percent over the past two years, deepening an already severe cost-of-living crisis after years of war.

Yet much of the opposition to Netanyahu is not opposition to Israel's brutality against Palestinians, but anger over how he has managed it. The major anti-Netanyahu Zionist parties are themselves divided over leadership and coalition strategy, while a central line of attack against Netanyahu has been his responsibility for the October 7 security failure. Recent polling has shown both the Netanyahu and anti-Netanyahu blocs struggling to reach the 61 seats required to govern. The sources warned that the combination of political fracture and a growing population of heavily

armed, traumatized veterans has historical precedents. "Famously, the Freikorps of Germany were PTSD-addled veterans with weapons and bloodthirst," he said. "I'm not saying Israel post-Gaza is Germany post-WWI, but there are certainly aspects of this that ring similar to me."

Israel is also confronting growing isolation abroad, including an erosion of support in the United States that Israeli officials themselves have privately treated as a long-term threat. The August report pointed to Israel increasingly becoming a pariah state as a factor that could lead to state breakdown.

According to another CIA assessment Capital & Empire reported in July, Israeli officials believe the American political consensus underpinning the alliance is breaking down and that continued reliance on billions of dollars in direct US military aid may eventually become politically untenable. Their response has been to seek deeper integration into the American military, intelligence, and defense establishment — ties that would be harder for fu-

ture governments to unwind. By this spring, 60% of Americans viewed Israel unfavorably, up from 53% a year earlier, according to a Pew Research Center survey.

That deterioration of support is increasingly visible inside the US national security establishment, as well. "The intelligence community, like America, like the military, like everywhere, is growing frustrated with the real and political capital that's spent on propping up Israel," the source said. "As we're moving forward with further integrating our military-industrial capacity with them, there's deep frustration that we're doing this for a country that dragged us into a war we're losing, a country that spies on us."

The CIA report also tried to game out how these pressures could interact if Israel's internal crisis deepened — how a single spark

could turn political fracture into open civil conflict, and what would follow from there. Among the scenarios raised were foreign technology and artificial-intelligence companies pulling investment or personnel from Israel, further eroding an already strained economy, regional governments reconsidering the political and strategic value of deeper normalizing relations with Israel, and Hamas or Hezbollah exploiting a period of domestic weakness. The report specifically used the term "civil conflict," according to the sources.

For decades, Israel's power depended not only on weapons and American backing but on the projection that its military dominance, intelligence superiority, and internal cohesion made the state effectively unbreakable. But as the assessment warned, beneath that projection of overwhelming force, Israel is accumulating economic, political, and social contradictions that military might alone may not be able to contain.



Demonstrators protest against the Israeli cabinet at Habima Square in Tel Aviv on June 13, 2026.

● AVSHALOM SASSONI/FLASH90

The article first appeared on Drop Site News.



"The writers of this are Israel experts," a source in the intelligence community noted, "this isn't a fantastical what if — with the upcoming election and the fissures in Israel, we should take seriously their conclusion that Israel is one spark away from real internal conflict." The CIA report also tried to game out how these pressures could interact if Israel's internal crisis deepened.

Collective impact of intelligence reforms by democracies

By Tom Field
Research fellow for strategy
and national security at IISS

OPINION

Across the globe, democracies are establishing new intelligence services (Japan and Sweden), reforming national-security legislation (Germany, the Philippines, South Korea and Taiwan), or debating reforms (Canada). These changes are driven by geopolitical tensions; the perceived unreliability of the United States; and emerging national-security threats that demand new legislative powers.

It is the potential collective impact of these reforms that warrants monitoring, specifically in three main areas. Firstly, the extent to which reforms establish states and groups of states with independent intelligence capabilities. Secondly, whether new domestic-security powers being introduced across democracies create a critical mass of national territories that are hard operating environments for foreign intelligence activity. Thirdly, whether the creation of independent intelligence-collection and assessment capabilities grants those democracies greater strategic autonomy.

A multipolar world of intelligence powers

If successful, intelligence reforms could turn large and small states into new intelligence powers. In 2026, Germany increased its intelligence-services budget by 26% to €1.5 billion (around \$1.7b), and Japan allocated around \$400 million (around 61.8b yen) to launch a new National Intelligence Bureau that will centralise intelligence collection. Germany and Japan are also currently debating respective legislation that would create wide-ranging intelligence-collection powers, and the latter would also create a new human-intelligence (HUMINT) service. As the world's third- and fourth-largest economies, both states could establish significant intelligence capabilities if legislation grants them the powers to do so. Smaller democracies could also wield outsized influence if they successfully leveraged their comparative advantages. A non-exhaustive list of examples includes their access to critical geographic regions, cultural and regional expertise, convening powers and national expertise in dual-use technologies/industries. Some democracies could also leverage excellent reporting streams that they have historically developed, such as diplomatic and commercial reporting, in lieu of secret intelligence. Given the pace of change in the national-security field, there is a real opportunity for these new and reformed intelligence services to develop innovative new intelligence capabilities.

Collectively, these reforms could also create a broader and more resilient intelligence ecosystem of democracies that cover varied geographies, cultures and economies. This makes them potentially valuable partners to established intelligence powers with whom many already enjoy close relationships, such as France and the non-US members of Five



● CRISTIANA COUCEIRO/POLITICO

Eyes (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom). Although references to 'Euro Eyes' or 'Six Eyes' are premature, new instances of intelligence cooperation are emerging. These partnerships allow established intelligence services to burden-share and use newcomers' unique capabilities to supplement their operations. In turn, less well-established partners benefit from upskilling in key areas (e.g., tradecraft) and can exchange operational support for intelligence from the more experienced partner agency. It is likely that some of these relationships will deepen as intense geopolitical competition has historically led to greater intelligence collaboration. Examples include the Five Eyes during the Cold War and the Club de Berne establishing the Counter Terrorist Group after 9/11.

New national-security powers and resilience

Changes to domestic-security laws offer democracies the power to turn their territories into difficult operating environments for hostile intelligence activities. Japan, the Philippines, South Korea and Taiwan have introduced, or are reviewing, their counter-espionage and/or counter-interference laws. This updated legislation is necessary to disrupt modern national-security threats that are rapidly evolving. The UK's introduction of the National Security Act 2023 (NSA) modernised key language, intro-

duced new offences and lowered the burden of proof for intent to allow defendants to be convicted if they 'ought reasonably to know' that their actions benefit a foreign power. The National Security (State Threats) Act 2026 then provided the Home Secretary with the power to proscribe the growing number of proxy groups used by hostile states. The NSA has led to a surge in law-enforcement disruptions, while the State Threats Act has led to the proscription of three proxy groups (two Iranian and one Russian). Regular reviews of this legislation will seek to identify its limitations and recommend updates that allow it to keep pace with evolving national-security threats.

If a critical mass of democracies modernise their national-security powers, this would significantly increase the financial, technical and human resources that foreign intelligence services need to operate covertly within these territories. There are two potential drivers for these reforms. Firstly, several democracies already have well-developed national-security powers and bodies that offer a precedent for uptake by other democracies. For example, Japan's new intelligence- and security-coordinating bodies are influenced by the UK's Joint Intelligence Committee and National Security Secretariat. Secondly, those democracies engaging in reform are so geographically and culturally varied that they can themselves

set a precedent for reform among a wide set of regional neighbours. However, the spread of modernised powers is not guaranteed. Passing legislation is time-consuming, particularly in states in which intelligence organisations have a history of misuse. Democratic oversight, although critical, can also be burdensome and create bottlenecks if not carefully managed. These more challenging cases warrant monitoring as they will serve as litmus tests for sustained reform.

Sovereign intelligence and strategic autonomy

Sovereign-intelligence collection and assessment, alongside offensive cyber and sabotage capabilities, could give democracies greater strategic autonomy. For decades, some democratic governments have relied on intelligence supplied by the US and other partners, leaving them dependent on foreign decisions about what intelligence to share or withhold. Limited domestic-intelligence assessment capacity also constrains autonomy by weakening governments' ability to integrate intelligence into their decision-making. Japan's new intelligence-assessment body aims to overcome this issue



Japan's House of Representatives passes a bill to establish a national-intelligence committee, in Tokyo, on April 23, 2026.

● KAZUHIRO NOGI/AFP



and present centrally-assessed material to political leaders. Meanwhile, the development of offensive cyber and sabotage capabilities will enable democratic leaders to pre-emptively disrupt hostile actors, as well as provide another mechanism to deter adversaries that falls between the extremes of a conventional military response and political/economic sanctions.

Reforms also offer an opportunity to upskill political leaders who may be unfamiliar with using sovereign intelligence evaluated by sovereign intelligence-assessment bodies. There are two challenges that political leaders need to overcome to develop greater strategic autonomy through new sovereign-intelligence capabilities. Firstly, leaders are unlikely to be sophisticated intelligence users, at least initially. But these leaders will be well-placed to draw on the experience of international peers who are already highly experienced users. Secondly, in states where intelligence has historically been abused for political purposes, leaders will be conscious of the need to build public confidence in new institutions and powers. Here, the mature oversight and compliance frameworks of established democratic intelligence powers offer useful models for securing public support.

Intelligence reforms among democracies could create a broader democratic intelligence ecosystem that is less dependent on any one state. In turn, these reforms could degrade the ability of foreign intelligence services to operate covertly in democratic states that have historically been viewed as permissive operating environments. Together, new intelligence capabilities at home and overseas could offer greater strategic autonomy to democratic leaders. The success of these reforms is not guaranteed within each state, let alone collectively. But there are clear opportunities for collaboration between established and emerging democratic intelligence powers that wish to build a more resilient democratic intelligence ecosystem.

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

Collectively, these reforms could also create a broader and more resilient intelligence ecosystem of democracies that cover varied geographies, cultures and economies. This makes them potentially valuable partners to established intelligence powers with whom many already enjoy close relationships, such as France and the non-US members of Five Eyes (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom).

U23 Wrestling World Championships: Final-day heroics as Iran clinches Greco-Roman three-peat



Iranian wrestlers Erfan Jarkani (left) and Yasin Yazdi celebrate with the national flag after winning gold in their respective Greco-Roman events at the U23 Wrestling World Championships in Las Vegas, Nevada, United States, on October 14, 2026.



Sports Desk

Iran collected two gold medals through Erfan Jarkani and Yasin Yazdi in the Greco-Roman competition to secure a third successive team title in the discipline at the U23 Wrestling World Championships in Las Vegas, United States. The final-day triumph, coupled with a gold and two bronze medals on the preceding day, saw the Iranian 10-man squad leapfrog its rivals to claim the title with 119 points. Kazakhstan, having led the standings for the best part of the three days of action, settled for the runner-up spot with 114 points, courtesy of two golds, one silver and two bronzes, while Russia – eligible for team points for the first time since 2021 – finished third on 105 points, collecting one gold, one silver and one bronze. A senior Asian silver medalist in April, Jarkani held on to a 1-1 lead on criteria against

Manato Nakamura in the 63kg final before the Japanese wrestler's failed challenge at the end of the bout saw the Iranian edge out a 2-1 victory. Jarkani went on to dedicate his gold medal to the 168 victims, including 120 schoolchildren, killed in a U.S.-Israeli airstrike on Shajareh Tayyebbeh Elementary School in Minab, southern Iran, on February 28. "To see the Iranian flag raised and hear our national anthem ring out in the heart of the U.S. under such difficult circumstances in my country was an indescribable feeling and a source of immense pride for me and all the team members. I'm happy that we were able to bring joy to the Iranian people," Jarkani said after adding to the bronze medal he won at the competition in 2024. At 87kg, Yazdi, also a silver medalist at the Asian Championships, secured the first gold medal of his international career with a 4-0 victory over Kazakhstan's Temirlan Turda-

kyn in what ultimately proved to be the team title decider. Yazdi was awarded the par terre position in the first period but failed to score. However, he opened the second period with a takedown, avoiding being placed in par terre himself. He was also awarded a second passivity point, extending his lead to 4-0. "I'd been waiting for this gold for about two or three years," Yazdi said. "I was able to win it here, and I hope I can keep winning more gold medals in the future." Yazdi said he had been aware of Turdakyn's shortcomings before the final and had focused more on standing exchanges than on par terre. "Before the final, I knew I could win the bout because I felt my opponent wasn't as well-prepared as I was," he said. "My opponent was tall, and I thought I might have trouble taking him down and controlling him on the mat, which is why I focused most of my ef-

fort on the standing exchanges. "I could tell that my opponent was starting to get tired in the last 30 seconds of the first period, so in the second period I put even more pressure on him," added the Iranian, a world U20 silver medalist in 2023. Wednesday's results followed Abolfazl Mohmedi's triumph in the 82kg class, while Mohammad Kamali and Mohammad-Hadi Seydi claimed bronze medals in their respective divisions. Mohmedi defeated opponents from Georgia, Croatia and Russia – conceding just one point in the process – to set up a final clash with Maritk Petrosyan, before edging out the Armenian 2-1 to take his medal tally at the competition to two, having won bronze last year in Novi Sad, Serbia. In the 67kg class, Kamali enjoyed an emphatic run to the semifinals, claiming three victories by technical superiority, but was no match for Russia's

Erzu Zakriev, suffering a 13-2 defeat. The Iranian bounced back with a 6-0 win over Armenia's Yurik Hoveyan in the bronze-medal bout. Seydi also finished on a winning note, recovering from a 4-1 loss to Ukrainian defending champion Yehor Yakushenko in the 97kg semifinals to defeat Kazakhstan's Nurassyl Amanaly 8-0 in the bronze-medal bout. Elsewhere, Mohammad Ashiri and Ahmadreza Mohsennejad endured disappointing campaigns, suffering early exits from the competition. Ashiri fell to an 8-6 defeat against Olivier Tomasz Skrzypczak in his opening bout in the 60kg class and missed out on a second chance to reach the podium after the Polish wrestler failed to advance to the final. A bronze medalist last year, Mohsennejad, who also won bronze at the Asian Championships, saw his 72kg campaign come to an end after a

single bout, as his 3-1 defeat to Shakhzod Kuchkorov was followed by the Uzbek wrestler's loss in the next round. Meanwhile, reigning world U20 champion Armin Shamsipour suffered a shock 8-1 defeat to Vishvajit Ramchandra More in the 55kg quarterfinals and was denied a shot at bronze after a shoulder injury sustained against the Indian forced him out of the repechage. Ahoura Bouveiri, who was beaten by eventual champion Moustafa Alameeldin of Egypt in the second round, also missed out on a medal in the 77kg class after falling to a 10-1 defeat to Azerbaijan's Ruslan Nurullayev in the repechage. The 130kg event, dominated by Iran's Fardin Hedayati in the previous two editions, proved disappointing for the country this time, as Abolfazl Fat'hi – a world U20 bronze medalist last year – was beaten by Hungary's Laszlo Darabos on criteria after a 1-1 bout to crash out in the round of 16.

Preparations for 2027 Asian Cup in Saudi Arabia 'progressing according to schedule'

THE NATIONAL – The local organizing committee of the 2027 AFC Asian Cup said preparations for hosting football's flagship continental event in Saudi Arabia are going ahead as per schedule despite recent attacks in the kingdom. The 19th edition of the Asian Cup is set to kick off with a Group A game between the host and Palestine at Riyadh's King Fahd Sports City Stadium on January 7. Saudi Arabia saw a number of events called off or postponed as fighting intensified between the kingdom and Yemen's Ansarullah resistance movement.

Multiple attacks on airports in the country forced the Six Kings men's tennis tournament, scheduled for October 21-24, and the FIFA Esports final, set for October 16-25, to be postponed. Three matches in the Saudi Pro League this weekend were rescheduled to later in the season due to "logistical considerations". Cristiano Ronaldo's Al-Nassr saw its Asian Champions League Elite match at home against Uzbekistan's PFC Neftchi delayed by an hour on Monday after Saudi Arabia's Civil Defense said it had intercepted a missile fired towards Riyadh.

However, the tournament's local organizing committee said preparations are going ahead according to schedule. "Preparations across all organizational and operational areas are progressing according to the approved schedule, including work on venues, facilities and supporting services," the organizing committee said. "The LOC will continue to monitor developments relevant to the tournament and ensure the appropriate conditions are in place for its successful delivery." Earlier this week, AFC president Salman bin Ibrahim Al Khalifa said the

confederation was in "no hurry" to decide whether the tournament needed to be postponed. "We can wait until the end of November. Things can change very quickly for better or worse in the region and it is question of seeing what happens," Al Khalifa told reporters in Zurich during the FIFA Council meeting. The Korea Football Association (KFA), meanwhile, said it was in communication with the AFC. "We are closely monitoring the situation in Saudi Arabia and plan to continue discussions regarding overall developments," the KFA said in a statement.



Iranica Desk

The fourth National Walnut Festival was held in Kolowr town, the center of Shahrud District in Khalkhal, with tourists from various provinces, producers and local residents attending the event, which aimed to promote the area's agricultural and tourism attractions.

According to IRNA, the mayor of Kolowr said the festival had received a warm welcome from visitors from Gilan, Zanjan, Ardabil, East Azarbaijan, Tehran and Alborz provinces.

Morteza Motahari added that, following years of efforts, the festival was included in the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts' national events calendar in 2024, turning Kolowr into a hub for cultural exchange among different ethnic groups.

He said specialized exhibition booths and the introduction of local artists provided a valuable opportunity to showcase the area's natural and historical attractions and promote ecotourism in the ancient Shahrud region.

Fourth National Walnut Festival draws tourists to Kolowr

The representative of Khalkhal and Kowsar in the Parliament also described the festival as an important step toward introducing the southern parts of Ardabil Province and their attractions.

Vahid Kan'ani said the region's natural resources and potential had not been adequately promoted. He stressed the need to develop infrastructure and attract investors to make better use of the agricultural and tourism potential of Khalkhal and Kowsar.

The head of Khalkhal's Agricultural Jihad Department announced that more than 3,500 tons of walnuts had been harvested from Khalkhal's productive orchards this year. Hassan Nourmohammadi said Khalkhal produces 60

percent of Ardabil Province's walnuts, with an average yield of 2.5 tons per hectare.

He identified annual rejuvenation pruning and top-working of approximately 50 hectares of old trees, the replacement of existing trees with varieties resistant to cold and drought, and the expansion of more than 100 hectares of grafted orchards as key measures to sustain and increase walnut production in the region.

The festival featured local music and performances, along with 25 booths offering various walnut varieties, orchard products, organic rural produce, traditional breads and sweets, and handicrafts.



● chn.ir

Khoy highlights Shams Tabrizi's role in transforming Rumi

Iranica Desk

The Shams Tabrizi Mausoleum in Khoy, West Azarbaijan Province, has reopened after a two-decade hiatus, offering a gathering place for mystics, literary figures and admirers of Shams and Rumi from around the world, particularly from Iran and Konya, Türkiye.

Shams Tabrizi was a mystic and literary figure whose ideas shone like rays of sunlight into Rumi's soul, transforming the course of the poet's life. Before meeting Shams, Rumi was a scholar and Islamic jurist who taught religious sciences at four renowned madrasas. Following their encounter, however, he moved away from teaching and preaching and turned to poetry and the mystical practice of sama, a form of spiritual listening and movement.

Shams encouraged Rumi to remain silent, regarding silence as one of the essential stages of the mystical path. Rumi's change in



● IRNA

behavior and lifestyle, and his devotion to Shams, astonished those around him. His companions, prominent figures and even close associates struggled to understand him. His practices alongside Shams prompted some who had known him to turn against him. Sensing that the atmosphere had become

hostile, Shams left Konya without warning after 16 months. Eight centuries after Shams's passing, and following a two-decade hiatus in construction, his mausoleum reopened in Khoy on October 7, 2026, to serve as a meeting place for admirers of the two great mystics from Iran and Konya.

Shams Tabrizi occupies an exceptional place in the history of Iranian mysticism. His name is most closely associated with the intellectual and spiritual transformation of Jalal al-Din Muhammad Balkhi, widely known as Rumi.

The encounter between Shams and Rumi in Konya gave rise to one of the most significant narratives in the history of mysticism and Persian literature. Yet Shams's significance extends beyond his relationship with Rumi. He embodied questioning, passion, the pursuit of truth and the rejection of habitual ways of thinking. Perhaps this is why writers, philosophers and enthusiasts of mysticism have continued to explore his life and ideas for centuries.

With Khoy now home to the final resting place of this great mystic and literary figure, the city has an opportunity to present itself to the world as Shams's homeland and a cultural gateway to Iran. The world

should know that Iran gave rise to the mystic and thinker who transformed Rumi's intellectual world, leading him away from teaching and preaching toward the heights of Persian literature and mysticism.

Shams cannot be understood merely in the shadow of Rumi's towering legacy. Sometimes, to understand a summit, one must return to the source that changed its course.

Khoy, the city of Shams, represents a gateway to Iran's cultural heritage, history and traditions. The world should recognize the centuries of literature, mysticism, poetry and thought connecting Shams, whose name is associated with Iran, and Rumi, whose legacy is closely linked to Konya. This exceptional cultural asset requires strategic planning to be transformed into social and economic capital.

Three principles informed the architectural design of the mausoleum: the wisdom of Iranian

architecture, geometry and nature. The central memorial space features a distinctive vertical structure that connects with sunlight at its highest point.

The initial design proposed installing a sun-tracking mirror at the top of the central structure to direct sunlight toward Shams's memorial stone in the prayer space. The concept illustrates how light can become more than a natural element and form part of an architectural narrative. The project also sought to use light and shadow to create a distinctive spatial and symbolic experience.

The mausoleum was designed not merely as a memorial site but as a cultural and research complex. Alongside the main memorial space, the plans include an exhibition hall, an auditorium, a research library, study areas and accommodation for researchers, allowing the complex to support ongoing cultural and academic activities. The project covers a total area of 7,000 square meters, including 3,500 square meters of buildings and landscaped grounds.

Iranica Desk

The historic quarter of Dehdasht, known as Belad-e Shapur, is one of the most significant heritage sites in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province in southwestern Iran. Recent archaeological excavations indicate that settlement at the site dates back around 7,000 years. However, the failure to establish a legally approved protected zone, the loss of historic land, inconsistent funding and a lack of tourism infrastructure are threatening the future of the national heritage site.

Located south of modern-day Dehdasht, the historic quarter takes its name from Shapur I, the Sassanid king to whom the founding of a city in the area is attributed. The complex includes more than 2,000 houses, four major mosques, a historic bazaar, a caravanserai, seven public bathhouses, a school, a water reservoir and a water supply network, according to chn.ir.

The site was registered as a national heritage monument on August 18, 1985. It originally covered more than 40 hectares, but extensive sections have been lost to the expansion of the modern city. Today, approximately 35 to 37 hectares remain.

Until 2025, the history of Belad-e Shapur was largely associated with the Safavid and broader Islamic periods. However, the site's

7,000 years of history at risk in Belad-e Shapur

first research-oriented stratigraphic excavation has provided a new perspective on its history. Zabihollah Masoudinia, an archaeologist who has spent more than two years studying the historic quarter, said excavation findings point to a long and continuous history of settlement.

"The results indicate continuous, long-term occupation beginning in the fifth and sixth millennia BCE and continuing through the Elamite, Parthian, Sassanid, Safavid and Qajar periods," he said. Masoudinia added that the site's uppermost archaeological layer dates to the Qajar period. While most of the surviving architecture belongs to the Islamic era, pre-Islamic finds consist mainly of pottery, metal and stone objects. He noted that the largest excavation trench measured just three by three meters.

Archaeological investigations at the site began in the 1990s under Ahmad Azadi and continued through nine excavation seasons until 2004, focusing on some of the city's most important structures. In 2008, the site was surveyed as part of a broader archaeological assessment of Kohgiluyeh.

Hossein Sepidnameh carried out



● chn.ir

debris removal and excavation work along the southern and western sections of the enclosure surrounding the citadel's administrative complex during two seasons, in 2020 and 2022. In 2021, Masoudinia conducted test excavations and stratigraphic studies to reassess the site's boundaries and protected zone.

According to Masoudinia, establishing the site's official boundaries and protected area is the most urgent step towards safeguarding the historic quarter.

The previous boundaries, drawn up in the 2000s, were based on the conditions and planning assumptions of the time and lacked sufficient precision. A reassessment was completed in 2021,

and the report was submitted to the provincial cultural heritage authorities in 2022 for follow-up. The proposed protected zone covers nearly 300 hectares, most of it comprising agricultural land behind a hill and extending towards the village of Borj-e Ali Shir. Special restrictions on building heights have been proposed for the area.

Aliasghar Atashfaraz, deputy for cultural heritage at the Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province's Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts Department, confirmed the scale of the proposed zone, saying the boundary and site assessment report had been prepared and sent to the ministry.

Ministry experts raised a number of objections during several rounds of review, all of which were subsequently addressed by the research team, he said.

Atashfaraz added that technical review meetings had been repeated several times because of the site's sensitivity. Authorities are now awaiting a final meeting to approve and formally announce the proposed boundaries. Masoudinia stressed that the proposed zone cannot serve as the basis for effective protection or planning until it has received official approval and been formally notified.

The archaeologist attributed the reduction in the historic quarter's area — from approximately 44 hectares, or 40 hectares according to some accounts, to around 37 hectares — to construction and encroachment.

He also cited inappropriate restoration work and changes of use carried out without adequate expert assessment, attributing these problems to the absence of a comprehensive restoration plan.

The site's natural setting has also suffered damage in recent decades. This deterioration, combined with the lack of baseline data on the sequence of

settlement, represents a major obstacle to the site's potential inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Other challenges include irregular and unreliable funding, which has disrupted archaeological research, and the absence of basic tourism facilities, including temporary accommodation and clearly defined visitor routes. As a result, Belad Shapur has not become a regular stop on major tourist itineraries.

Drawing comparisons with historic cities such as Fez in Morocco and Bukhara in Uzbekistan, Masoudinia said the site's future depended on the simultaneous development of four key areas: scientific research, appropriate restoration, community participation and sustainable tourism. He also called for a comprehensive management plan, reliable long-term funding and an annual program of archaeological excavations.

Community involvement, he said, remains a missing link in efforts to preserve the site. Local residents must have access to education and economic opportunities linked to the historic quarter if they are to develop a lasting sense of ownership and attachment to it. Private-sector investment would also be difficult to attract unless the government first provided the necessary infrastructure, he added.



Prominent filmmaker hails Iranian people after ‘Bread and Books’ wins at Busan

Korean award makes Majidi’s film eligible for Oscar race

Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian filmmaker Majid Majidi paid tribute to the Iranian people and dedicated the top prize at the 31st Busan International Film Festival to them after his latest feature, ‘Bread and Books’, won best film at the South Korean event. “You are the real heroes of our films. Cinema is alive because of you, and we make films out of love for you,” Majidi said, IRNA reported on Thursday. At the festival’s closing ceremony, Majidi thanked his family and the film crew for their dedication to the project. The festival took place from October 6 to 15, 2026, in Busan, a city in southeastern South Korea, bringing together films from across Asia and beyond. The victory also makes ‘Bread and Books’ eligible for consideration in the international feature

film category at the Academy Awards under new rules linking the Busan prize to Oscar eligibility. However, the win does not guarantee an Oscar nomination. The film centers on Davoud Solan, a contract teacher at a school in an impoverished village in the Chabahar region of southeastern Iran. Hoping to land a permanent teaching position and find a home for himself and his mother, Solan faces a major setback when a benefactor who had been paying for the students’ meals dies. With the school’s future in jeopardy and its pupils at risk of losing their meals, he turns to fuel smuggling to keep the school running, forcing him to confront difficult moral choices. The story highlights poverty, educational inequality and the obstacles children in disadvantaged communities face in accessing education. Majidi revealed that his mother,

who died before filming began, had always been a source of support. He said her spirit and prayers remained with the film throughout its production. Her character was portrayed by a woman with no previous acting experience. In dedicating the prize to Iranians, the director praised their enduring resistance to oppression and their pursuit of independence. He also voiced hope for a world free of war, where peace, love and brotherhood prevail. Majidi also spoke about the attack on Shajareh Tayyebah School in Minab, southern Iran. The school was hit by a US missile strike on February 28, the first day of the US-Israeli war against Iran, killing 168 people, most of them children. Majidi said some of the children’s bodies had never been recovered. He further added that during



Iranian director Majid Majidi, who won the grand prize at the 31st Busan International Film Festival for his film ‘Bread and Books’, walks the red carpet at the closing ceremony, Busan, South Korea on October 15, 2026.
● YONHAP NEWS

40-day US-Israeli aggression, around 150,000 homes had been bombed and between 4,000 and 5,000 people had been killed in the strikes. Majidi is among Iran’s best-known filmmakers on the international stage. His film ‘Children of Heaven’ earned an Academy Award nomination for best foreign-language film in 1999, bringing wider international attention to Iranian cinema. His other acclaimed works include ‘The Color of Paradise,’ ‘Baran’ and ‘The Song of Sparrows.’ His films frequently explore the lives of children and low-income families, placing people facing



hardship at the center of stories about difficult moral choices and human dignity. These themes are also central to ‘Bread and Books,’ which portrays a teacher’s struggle to keep a school serving a disadvantaged community afloat. The 2026 edition of the Busan International Film Festival

featured 246 officially selected films from 59 countries, including 95 world premieres, according to the organizers. The festival also reached a new milestone this year after receiving A-list accreditation from the International Federation of Film Producers’ Associations.

Hafez gathering in Stockholm highlights Persian cultural ties

Arts & Culture Desk

Writers, researchers and cultural figures of Iranian, Afghan, Tajik and Uzbek descent gathered in Stockholm, Sweden to honor Persian poet Hafez and discuss his literary legacy and the role of Persian in connecting communities beyond borders. The event, titled ‘Hafez at the Summit of Persian Ghazal,’ was held at the Avicenna Hall of the Iranian Embassy to commemorate Hafez of Shiraz. Speakers examined his place in Persian literature, the mystical dimensions of his work and the language’s role in sustaining cultural ties. Iranian Ambassador to Sweden Hojjatollah Faghani



attributed Hafez’s enduring appeal to his blending of love, mysticism, Quranic teachings and linguistic subtlety. He also highlighted the poet’s influence on German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and American essayist Ralph

Waldo Emerson.

Ataollah Mohajerani, a writer and former Iranian culture minister, discussed the Quran’s influence on Hafez’s poetry and worldview, focusing on the religious and mystical concepts woven into his verses. Afghan poet and former diplomat Abdolghafour

Arezou described Persian as a lasting bond among communities that extends beyond modern political borders. Minoo Shams, an Iranian children’s literature writer based in Sweden, stressed the need to introduce the younger generation of Iranian migrants to Persian poetry and literature to help preserve their cultural heritage. The program also featured poetry readings by writers from Afghanistan, Tajikistan and other Persian-speaking communities. Participants closed the gathering with discussions on Hafez’s enduring legacy and literature’s role in maintaining cultural connections among Persian speakers.

Iranian groups to take part in Kirkuk street theater festival

Arts & Culture Desk

Six Iranian theater groups will participate in the 10th International Street Theater Festival in Kirkuk, northern Iraq, which opens on November 11, ISNA reported on Thursday. Afshin Naseri, a member of the festival’s organizing secretariat and international committee, said that 24 productions from 12 countries, including France, the Netherlands, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, Argentina, Spain, Russia, Brazil, Tunisia and Palestine, will be presented. “Iran will have the largest number of productions at this year’s event,” he said. The festival’s theme is “Theater: A Common Language among Nations and a Bridge to Peace and Coexistence”. Its opening program will feature a carnival through the streets of Kirkuk, with street theater performances and music. One of this year’s highlights will be the presentation of the festival’s Golden Statuette to internationally recognized artists who have worked to promote peace and reconciliation, Naseri said.



The research section will publish selected studies in book form rather than ask researchers to submit paper abstracts. The books will be distributed to participating groups during the festival. The event is fully competitive, with five prizes to be presented for directing, writing, best actress, best actor and best group. Iranian participants will include groups from Bukan and Saqqez cities in western and northwestern Iran, Sanandaj city in western Iran and Miandoab city in northwestern Iran. Iran will also have two representatives in the festival’s executive and international committees. Naseri serves on the international committee.

Calculus of risk

By engaging in a high-risk operation, Trump aims to shatter the illusion of an untouchable Axis of Resistance. **Page 1 >** First, there is the goal of Degrading Asymmetric Capabilities. The U.S. recognizes that the Houthi-Iranian synergy is based on the ability to impose costs on the U.S. without facing symmetric retaliation. A decisive, high-impact operation serves to dismantle the infrastructure of these asymmetric threats, proving that “sanctuaries” in Yemen or the Iranian coast are no longer safe.

Second, the intervention is a Psychological Reset. In geopolitical signaling, a “risk-averse” superpower is seen as a declining one. By operating in high-threat environments, the U.S. signals that it is willing to accept tactical risks to achieve a strategic victory. This is intended to intimidate regional proxies and force Tehran to recalculate its cost-benefit analysis regarding the blockade of maritime straits. However, Iran, as the principal regional power, considers its legitimate right to employ defensive and asymmetric deterrence

instruments against foreign military presence and threats to its national security and economic interests, and to confront any American military adventure with heavy costs.

Strategic gamble: risk vs. reward

The operational risk is undeniable: the potential for a miscalculation leading to a full-scale regional war. However, the “risk of inaction” is viewed as higher. If the U.S. allows the Bab al-Mandab or the Strait of Hormuz to be effectively controlled by non-state

actors or a hostile regional power, the global economy suffers, and the U.S. loses its status as the guarantor of maritime security. Furthermore, this move aligns with the broader objective of forcing a “better deal” or total capitulation from Iran. By demonstrating a willingness to operate in the “danger zone,” the U.S. creates a climate of uncertainty for the Iranian leadership, undermining their strategic patience and forcing them to prioritize internal stability over regional expansion. Washington must accept that

the era of unilateral hegemony in the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea has come to an end, and that sustainable security in these vital waterways can only be achieved through regional cooperation, respect for national sovereignty, and an end to sanctions and maximum-pressure policies. Trump’s approach is a shift from “containment” to “active disruption.” While the military disposition of Iran and the Houthis suggests a high probability of attrition, the U.S. is leveraging its superior intelligence and precision-strike capabilities to deliver

a “strategic shock.” The goal is not necessarily a permanent occupation, but a decisive demonstration of power that restores the deterrent edge, ensuring that the cost of disrupting global trade becomes prohibitively expensive for the Axis of Resistance. Therefore, any American military adventure in the region will not only fail to create deterrence, but will also strengthen the resistance of the region’s nations and the synergy of the Axis of Resistance, bringing heavy strategic and economic costs upon the United States itself.