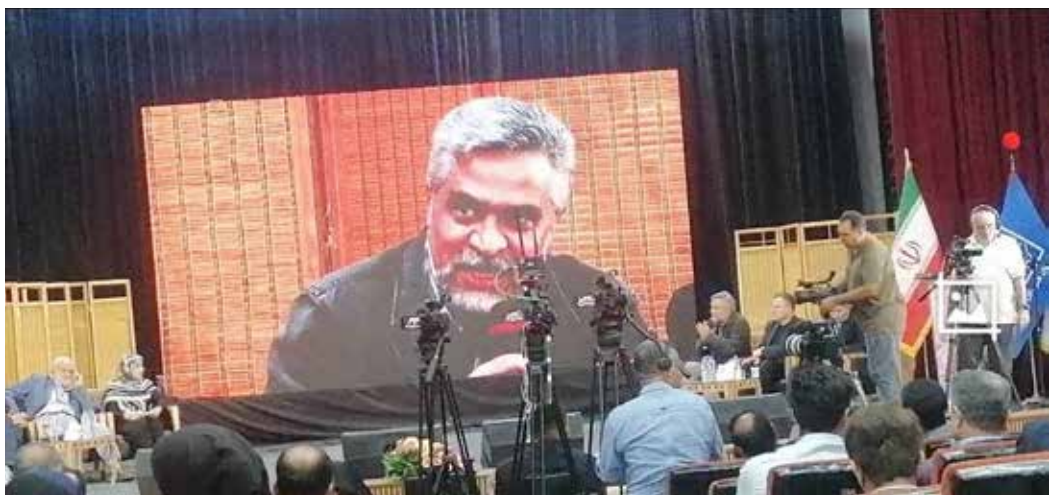
Shajareh Tayyebeh school; an account of lost children, grieving mothers



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PERSPECTIVE



Dr. Hossein Kermanpour speaks about his experience in Minab, southern Iran, where a fatal operation by the United States on February 28, 2026, during the first hours of their war of aggression against Iran, took the lives of 167 civilians, most of them schoolchildren.
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This report recounts my recent one-day journey to Minab and a visit to Shajareh Tayyebeh School, a place where a US military attack extinguished the lives of 167 children and their civilian teachers. During this journey, from Minab's Martyrs' Cemetery to the school's devastated classrooms, we encounter traces of lives left unfinished. Listening to the accounts of grieving mothers and survivors offers an opportunity to reflect on human suffering, the right to know the truth, and the media's responsibility to document catastrophe. Beyond geographical and political boundaries, this travelogue serves as a reminder of our shared responsibility to safeguard human life, truth, and the future of children.

Minab's Martyrs' Cemetery

It was noon when I arrived at Minab's Martyrs' Cemetery, where the bodies of the children from Shajareh Tayyebeh School had been laid to rest. I had anticipated that visiting this place would profoundly affect me, but I had not imagined that the sorrow awaiting me would be so overwhelming and harrowing. Upon entering Minab, the first thing to capture one's attention is the faces of children; their portraits are visible throughout the city. It is as though the city has acquired a new identity, one defined no longer solely by its name, history, and geography, but also by the faces of children who lost their lives in the US military attack on Shajareh Tayyebeh School. It is as though, from that moment onward, Minab has become another name for a sorrow that recognizes no borders.

At the cemetery, my eyes suddenly fell upon the portrait of one of the children. I stared into the child's eyes for several moments. I do not know why, but I felt as though those eyes were putting me on trial. It was as if they were asking me: Where were you adults? Why could you not protect us? Why could you not defend our most basic right, the right to life and childhood? Something inside me collapsed. I felt ashamed; a shame that did not stem from a personal incident, but rather from the helplessness of an entire generation in the face of the fate of children who had not yet had the opportunity to really know life. They were still at the beginning of their journey; they still knew the world through the classroom window, the schoolyard, and their mothers' embrace. How can one accept that this very small and secure world should suddenly have become the scene of their deaths?

I suddenly remembered that, 30 years ago, I was teaching at a village's elementary school. The children who sat before me in those classrooms back then have now grown up; each is pursuing a life and career somewhere in society. They had the opportunity to grow up; the opportunity to make choices, make mistakes, fall in love, create, and serve. They had the opportunity to speak of their childhood memories one day and reminisce about their schooldays. But the children of Minab were deprived of even this most elementary opportunity. They were still at the outset of their journey when a missile destroyed their school and their dreams. Wherever I went, the children's eyes followed me from their framed portraits. I could not escape those eyes. I kept asking myself: What had these children done to deserve this? What was their share of the world, other than schools, notebooks and pencils, childish games, simple friendships, and aspirations they had not yet had the opportunity to articulate? They knew nothing about war, nor had they played any part in the decisions of those who waged it. They were simply children; children who should have survived and grown up.

We left the cemetery and boarded the bus. Our destination was Shajareh Tayyebeh School.

A school where echoes of children's laughter still resound

Before the visit, I had seen photographs and videos of the school on social media. I had assumed that those images had enabled me to grasp, to some extent, the magnitude of the catastrophe; however, I was mistaken. There is a profound gulf between viewing an image on a mobile phone screen and standing at the site of an incident; a gulf between knowing and experiencing, between witnessing another person's suffering and finding oneself within the actual geography of that suffering. In cyberspace, the school's destruction is merely one image among thousands of others; we may pause for a moment, feel sorrow, and then scroll down and return to our everyday lives. But when you walk through the site of the incident, you can no longer pass by so easily. There, destruction is not merely an image; it has a location, it has a silence, and, above all, it bears the absence of people who once breathed within its walls.

When I entered Shajareh Tayyebeh School, the sight of the devastated classrooms unfolded before me. For a moment, I felt as though the world had collapsed upon my head. I saw classrooms that should have reverberated with teachers' voices, children's questions, the turning of notebook pages, and the din of students, but which had now become scenes of silence and devastation. I looked at the schoolyard; a yard that should have been a place of children's games, laughter, and running, but which now stood empty of its rightful occupants. Nevertheless, in my mind, I could hear their laughter. It was as though children were still running there, playing with one another, and eagerly awaiting recess. But reality was too bitter to evade: no one would ever again leave a classroom for recess.

At that moment, I understood why physical presence at the site of a catastrophe is something far beyond viewing its images. An image depicts reality; but physical presence confronts a person with loss. In an image, one can see the destruction of a classroom, but by visiting a devastated school, one suddenly begins to consider that every desk belonged to a child, every notebook had an owner, and every vacant space concealed an unfinished story. Here, one is no longer confronted with a destroyed building; one encounters an entire world of unfinished lives. One encounters children who can no longer return home, families who must henceforth live with the absence of their child, and a future that was taken from them in a single moment. But the most heartbreaking part of the story was still to come: the mothers.

Dr. Kermanpour: when a mother says, 'I wish I had kept my daughter in my arms'

At the session titled "The Story of the Stars: Representing Heroic Minab," Dr. Hossein Kermanpour, a physician and media activist, spoke about his experience in Minab and his encounters with the mothers of children who had lost their lives. He began his account neither with statistics and figures nor with a description of the school building's destruction, but with the voice of a mother who, confronted with the loss of her child, was ensnared in a thousand regrets and "if onlys". He spoke of a mother who, consumed by unbearable grief, said: "I wish I had not sent my daughter to school that day. I wish I had let her sleep in my arms. I wish I had gone in her place, but my child had remained alive, and a thousand other if onlys..."

> Perhaps that mother has asked herself thousands of times: What would have happened if I had made a different decision that day? What if I had kept my daughter at home? What if I had not allowed her to leave my embrace? But none of these questions has an answer capable of bringing her lost child back. What remains is a mother who must live with the memory of that final farewell; with an ordinary moment that was supposed to conclude like every other day, but instead became their last encounter.

These few sentences reveal the magnitude of the catastrophe more profoundly than thousands of pages of reports and analyses. This is a mother who still revisits that day in her mind and relives the moment when she saw her child off to school. Perhaps she has asked herself thousands of times: What would have happened if I had made a different decision that day? What if I had kept my daughter at home? What if I had not allowed her to leave my embrace? But none of these questions has an answer capable of bringing her lost child back. What remains is a mother who must live with the memory of that final farewell; with an ordinary moment that was supposed to conclude like every other day, but instead became their last encounter.

In this account, Dr. Kermanpour underscores a fundamental point: the narrative of Minab must not be confined to the accounts of those in power and politicians; it must be wrested from the monopoly of power and restored to those who bear the suffering. In his view, this catastrophe must be recounted through the voices of mothers, the injured, and children who survived the attack but continue to bear its physical and psychological consequences. This is because the reality of war cannot be reduced to casualty figures, military reports, political positions, and official statements. The reality of war must be sought in the lives of those who have lost their loved ones and whose futures have been altered forever.

This perspective differs substantially from conventional narratives of war. Ordinarily, those in power speak about war; its objectives, necessities, victories, and defeats. The media, too, sometimes unwittingly reproduce this very framework. Within such a narrative, human beings become numbers, while the suffering of families is relegated to the margins. Kermanpour, however, seeks to alter the point of departure: rather than waiting for those in power to confer legitimacy and official recognition upon a catastrophe, we must allow mothers and the injured to recount reality themselves.

A grieving mother should not have to await the endorsement of an official authority to have her voice heard. Her suffering is, in and of itself, part of reality and deserves to occupy the center of public attention. Here, a fundamental question arises: Who is better qualified to recount the loss of a child's life? An official who speaks about the dimensions of an attack, or a mother who feels her child's absence in her home every night? A reporter can gather information, a physician can explain the physical and psychological consequences of war, and an analyst can examine the





The families of the schoolgirls who were martyred due to a deadly American air strike on Shajareh Tayyebeh School in Minab, southern Iran, visit the graves of their beloved children on November 4, 2026.
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