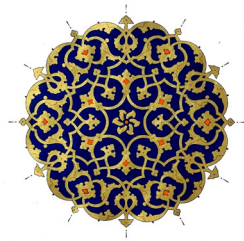


*In the name of Allah
the most Compassionate
the most Merciful*





PERSPECTIVES

The Emerging Order: Redefining Power and Security in West Asia

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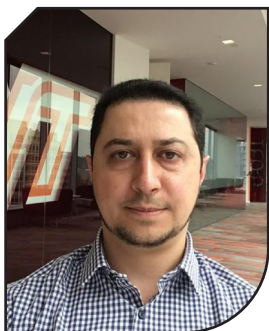
The Emerging Order : Redefining Power and Security in West Asia





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Introduction

Iran and the West have maintained interactions throughout history. Although the nature and forms of this relationship have been a combination of war, conflict, competition, and cooperation, the two sides have almost never been indifferent or self-sufficient regarding each other. Therefore, dialogue and engagement have always been a constant necessity in their relations.

In recent decades, Iran and the West have held different and sometimes opposing positions and policies on various issues. In such an environment, whenever the level of dialogue and interaction between them has diminished, the volume of misunderstandings and misperceptions has increased. This situation is further complicated by the presence of various actors and groups that actively seek to disrupt communication and shape each side's perception of the other. Even when the policies and stances of both sides are entirely divergent or conflicting, the need for dialogue and exchange of views remains undeniable.

In the current environment, where official state diplomacy and political-level discussions face multiple challenges and constraints, academic institutions, research centers, and think tanks can play a vital role in maintaining channels of dialogue and engagement between the two sides.

The Contemporary Nations Studies Institute (Iran-eurica), as an independent think tank that has been active in the field of specialized studies on the United States and Europe in Iran for over a decade, has defined one of its key missions in this regard. Its goal is not only to enhance the understanding of Iranian experts and policymakers about the United States and Europe but also to provide a platform for dialogue and engagement with think tanks and research centers in Europe and the United States. Through these efforts, the institute seeks to contribute to a more accurate and realistic understanding of the policies of the Islamic Republic. To this end, in recent years, the institute has invited European and American experts to Iran in various formats and has organized joint seminars with European and American think tanks.

Perspectives magazine aims to provide Western analysts and policymakers with a clear picture of Iran's perceptions and policies on various issues by leveraging the views and insights of Iranian political officials and analysts. The magazine

primarily features articles and interviews with current or former diplomats, university professors, and Iranian analysts, offering a realistic and unaltered representation of Iran and its policies to the West. This approach not only improves Western understanding and presents a realistic image of the Islamic Republic of Iran but also creates a platform for dialogue and exchange of ideas. Although the content and statements published in the magazine reflect solely the personal opinions of the contributors and do not, in any way, represent the official position of the Islamic Republic of Iran, they provide a valuable window for Western audiences to better understand the logic behind Iran's foreign policy decisions and strategies.

Editor's Note

**Dr. Behzad Ahmadi, Assistant professor at Faculty
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In a world that is transitioning at an unprecedented pace from established orders to new configurations of power, the West Asian region has once again become one of the principal focal points of this transformation. Recent developments—from the events following October 7 to the so-called “12-Day War” and its geopolitical consequences—have not only challenged traditional balances, but have also confronted previous analytical frameworks with fundamental questions. What we are witnessing today is not merely a shift in the balance of power, but rather a kind of redefinition of the logic of power, security, and deterrence at both the regional and even the global level.

The present issue, focusing on “The Iranian Perception of the Balance of Power in West Asia and the Future Outlook,” seeks, through interviews and analytical articles, to present a multilayered picture of this complex situation. In this regard, the detailed interview with Dr. Seyyed Jalal Dehghani Firoozabadi, as one of the prominent scholars of international relations, serves as an important point of departure for understanding recent developments. His analysis of the 12-Day War as a “turning point” in the regional security order draws our attention to the reality that many previous assumptions regarding deterrence, the role of actors, and even the nature of threats require serious reconsideration.

One of the most important points raised within this framework is the change in the function and effectiveness of “extraterritorial deterrence” and the necessity of moving toward “inward-oriented balancing.” This change is not merely a tactical adjustment, but a sign of transformation at the level of security doctrine. Under conditions in which some regional and extra-regional actors are seeking to establish a kind of hegemony—even if in a proxy form—the redefinition of the instruments of national power and the manner of their combination (military, economic, popular, and technological) has become an unavoidable necessity.

Alongside this discussion, the issue of the “two-pillar order” and efforts to reconstruct it in a new form constitute another key axis of this issue. The idea

according to which Israel is defined as the military-technological pillar and the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf as the economic-financial pillar within a new security architecture reflects a deliberate effort to manage the region through the delegation of responsibilities and the reduction of direct intervention by extra-regional powers. Nevertheless, as also noted in the analyses, this potential order faces numerous internal challenges; from competition among the regional actors themselves to perceptual gaps and conflicting interests.

At a broader level, the article “From Non-Proliferation to Deterrence” expands the horizon of analysis from the regional level to the international system. This article correctly demonstrates how the behavior of the United States toward Iran, beyond a single specific case, can erode the foundations of the global non-proliferation regime. The weakening of trust in security guarantees, the discrediting of international agreements, and the increasing prominence of the logic of hard power are all signs of entering a period in which “nuclear deterrence” is once again emerging as a serious option in the strategic calculations of states. This trend has consequences extending beyond Iran. The growing inclination among some U.S. allies to reconsider their security dependence and even raise nuclear options demonstrates that the crisis of trust has become a systemic phenomenon. In such an environment, the boundary between “security” and “insecurity” becomes increasingly fluid, and every action by one actor can trigger a chain of reactions.

In this same context, examining “The Internal Dynamics of European Policy toward Israel” reveals another dimension of this complexity. The European Union, which has always presented itself as a “normative power,” is now confronted with deep internal divisions. On the one hand are countries that justify unconditional support for Israel within the framework of historical and security considerations, and on the other hand are countries that emphasize the principles of human rights and international law. This duality has not only weakened the coherence of Europe’s foreign policy, but has also raised serious questions regarding the possibility of realizing the Union’s “strategic autonomy.” The totality of these discussions demonstrates that the West Asian region is entering a stage of “structural transition”; a stage in which the rules of the game have not yet been consolidated and actors are striving to define their position within the new order. Under such circumstances, “perception”—that is, the

way actors understand the environment, threats, and opportunities—acquires a decisive role. Misperception can lead to miscalculation and ultimately to costly crises, whereas accurate perception makes it possible to design more effective strategies.

From this perspective, the principal objective of this issue is not merely to describe developments, but rather to contribute to a deeper analytical understanding of ongoing trends and to provide a platform for scientific and strategic dialogue. We believe that during periods of transition, more than ever before, there is a need for multidimensional, critical, and reality-based analyses; analyses that neither fall into the trap of oversimplification nor become captive to stereotypical narratives.

In conclusion, it must be emphasized that the future of the balance of power in West Asia is not something predetermined, but rather the result of a complex interaction among the will of actors, structures of power, and international developments. What can shape the course of this future is the ability of actors to adapt to new conditions, redefine interests, and make intelligent use of the instruments of power. It is hoped that this issue will constitute, however modestly, a step toward clarifying this path and strengthening the analytical literature in this field.

Iranian Perception of the Balance of Power in the West Asian Region and the Future Outlook

**Interview with Dr. Dehghani, Secretary of the
Strategic Council on Foreign Relations of Iran**

Seyyed Jalal Dehghani Firoozabadi received his PhD in International Relations in 1995 from the University of Brussels, Belgium. He is currently a Full Professor of International Relations at Allameh Tabataba'i University and has authored numerous works on the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and International Relations theories. He is also a member of the editorial board of several of the most important scientific-research quarterlies in the fields of political science and international relations in Iran, and the scientific secretary of the Tehran Security Conference.



Dr. Firoozabadi has various political and executive positions in his record, including serving as Iran's Cultural Counselor in the UAE and formerly as the Political-Legal Deputy of the Islamic Parliament Research Center. In December 2025, he was appointed as the Secretary of the Strategic Council on Foreign Relations of Iran by a decree from Kamal Kharrazi.

What is the assessment and perception of the Islamic Republic regarding the status of the balance of power in the region? How do you think the future trend [of the balance of power] will be? Is [this balance] in favor of Iran or to its detriment? Is it stable or unstable?

Dr. Seyyed Jalal Dehghani Firoozabadi: Generally speaking, the 12-day war was a turning point in the region. In my opinion, the situation of the West Asia and Persian Gulf region must be divided into before and after the 12-day war. Of course, the events of October 7 were also a turning point; however, the 12-day war was much more decisive for the regional security order. As Netanyahu announced on the day of the incident or the day after, Al-Aqsa Flood was Israel's September 11. [This statement signifies] a type of historical simulation with the September 11 [events] for the United States, meaning that we (Israel) want to do in the region what the United States did in the international system. At that time, the Americans sought to exert their undisputed hegemony by emphasizing militarism, the use of power, and territorial occupation. This meant a return to geopolitics and the use of hard and military power to exert a type of malignant hegemony through the use of force. I believe that Israel, with U.S. support, seeks to reconstruct and reproduce such an order in the region to achieve hegemony. Of course, some believe that the security strategies of the United States and Israel in the region are not identical. [Meaning that] Israel seeks to create hegemony, while the United States seeks to maintain the balance of power in the region. But I think, considering the explanations Trump later gave—stating that “I” was directing the war—one cannot distinguish much difference between the two. [In fact,] we are facing an order based on U.S. proxy hegemony via Israel. It might be said that this order is a two-pillar order, similar to the Nixonian two-pillar order, consisting of Israel as the military-technological pillar and Saudi Arabia or the collective of Arab countries in the Persian Gulf as the economic and financial pillar. In other words, the transformation in the regional order is occurring based on the Abraham Accords.

After the 12-day war, the pillars of the regional order essentially changed entirely. After the numerous operations Israel conducted in the region, in my opinion, one of the fundamental elements and pillars of Iran's defense-security doctrine—namely, the reliance on extraterritorial deterrence—was transformed.

[This strategy] was weakened and lost its function after October 7 and the numerous operations. Therefore, this strategy was deterrent as long as it existed, and because it was weakened, Israel directly attacked Iran. Thus, we need to rethink our defense doctrine and extraterritorial deterrence. Regardless of whether extraterritorial deterrence is functional or not, we need to strengthen our territorial and national deterrence. We need “inward-oriented balancing.” In discussions related to “balancing,” there are two types: outward-oriented balancing and inward-oriented balancing. Outward-oriented balancing includes strategies such as regional and international alliances as well as extraterritorial deterrence. After the 12-day war and Israel’s attack on Doha, a general sense of threat from Israeli hegemony has formed in the region. Iran is trying to use this threat perception to create a new type of outward-oriented balancing.

Regarding the fact that the regional balance has changed into an imbalance to Iran’s detriment and that Iran is trying to somehow revive it through an outward-inward approach, please explain further.

Dr. Seyyed Jalal Dehghani Firoozabadi: It has been and remains my belief that Iran’s deterrence and national power in general are based on four pillars, one of which undoubtedly consists of military power. Despite all technological developments and soft power—which are, of course, undeniable—military and hard power remains one of the important determining elements of national power. Currently, the United States has increased its military budget to 1.5 trillion dollars. If military and defense power have become meaningless and obsolete, why are the Americans increasing [their military budget]? China is doing the same. In other words, I must say that military power is necessary but not sufficient. Therefore, our military power, and at its head, missile power, is one of the components of Iran’s national power. [Regional] presence was also one of the pillars and reinforcing elements of our national power and deterrence; if it has been weakened now, it must be strengthened again. We might make a change in the previous strategy, but the principle [of this strategy] is necessary. We might also put deterrence through integration and cooperation on the agenda; that is, within the framework of regional multilateralism and the idea of “Strong Iran, Strong Region.”

The most important element of power, however, is Iran's people-based power. Firstly, the Islamic Revolution of Iran is the most popular revolution in history; meaning that all revolutions were won with guerrilla forces, vanguards, parties, and the like, and the only revolution won with the presence of the general public was the Iranian revolution. Thus, the most important element of Iran's Islamic Revolution is the presence of the people. In the 8-year war, although the armed forces practiced great self-sacrifice, devotion, and bravery, it was not enough because we were engaged with half the world. Ultimately, it was this popular mobilization that preserved the country. After that, in various periods, the most important factor in Iran's deterrence and national power has been popular support and satisfaction. After the 12-day war as well, the most important element of national power is Iran's people-based power, which we must preserve. Incidentally, I think that the 12-day war project was flawless in terms of strategic, security, military, and political design. The only flaw in this project was the fourth pillar. The Israelis thought the people would cooperate with them, but they did not, and this project failed. Therefore, if we seek to strengthen our national power elements, all these pillars must exist in Iran's national power. The sum of these pillars is power-generating. Undoubtedly, economic and technological power is also very important in itself. To conclude, the balance has changed, and to maintain the balance, restore the previous balance, or establish a new balance, we must perform a re-balancing; of course, in my opinion, restoring the previous balance might not be realistic. At the level of regional balance, I feel that even the Turks and the Arabs have reached this historical understanding and awareness that Iran can be a balancing weight in the region.

What do you see as the elements affecting this new balance of power?

Dr. Seyyed Jalal Dehghani Firoozabadi: If we accept that the previous order has been disrupted and a new order is taking shape (sometimes we call it a transition period), then the most important concern for regional and extra-regional actors is appropriate positioning in the new order. Meaning, where does everyone (each country) stand? Everyone (each country) tries to occupy or be placed in the best position it can. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have good relations with

each other, but each loves itself more than its friend and wants to occupy the best place. The members of the Gulf Cooperation Council are united against common threats, but there are also competitions and differences among them. These countries usually turn to the differences between them when they feel the external threat has weakened. For example, now that a power vacuum has been created in Syria, Israel, Turkey, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia are all trying to take a larger portion of this cake. Naturally, Turkey thought that the main part of this cake (the lion's share), i.e., the big piece, would go to it; but Israel did not allow the Turks to do anything in this regard. Therefore, in the Syrian issue, Turkey is an important actor, whereas perhaps until before the fall of Assad in Syria, Turkey was one of the most ineffective actors in regional developments in the Middle East, because it could not define a specific position for itself and all positions had been captured before. But now, Turkey can define a position for itself through Syria. Second is Saudi Arabia. This country had set conditions for normalizing relations with Israel even before October 7, and after this event, I think these conditions have become more difficult; meaning it demands more concessions for normalization. The UAE also acts in full alliance with Israel. This area is also a field of indirect competition between Israel and Saudi Arabia. It is true that these countries are U.S. allies, but nonetheless, they have defined a sphere of national interest influence for themselves. These countries believe they are allies on a macro scale, but they have competitions within themselves. The UAE, backed by Israel, competes with Saudi Arabia and wants to gain a better position even within the Gulf Cooperation Council. Pakistan is a new force that has recently entered and is directly effective and decisive in the regional order. Which direction Iraq takes can be decisive—that is, balancing. Iran also, regardless of any kind of assessment other actors have, is a pole of power in terms of dimensions and elements of power and holds a position in the first rank. You might say that Iran was once a hegemon, but now, at the level of Britain after 1960, it has turned into a conventional regional power. Naturally, extra-regional powers are also decisive.

How do you see the agency of Europe and the United States?

Dr. Dehghani Firoozabadi: The Americans want to devolve their responsibility to that same two-pillar order I mentioned earlier—meaning to Israel and Saudi Arabia, or to the GCC collective. This matter is explicitly stated in the 2025 U.S. National Security Strategy. Another point regarding this strategy is that all regions no longer have equal importance for the United States; therefore, a type of prioritization is being carried out. In this same national security document, it is stated that the Western Hemisphere is the first priority of U.S. foreign policy, and the South China Sea, in competition with China, is the second priority. Regarding the Middle East, this document states that this region does not have its previous primary importance. According to this document, the Middle East and other regions that have been U.S. allies must themselves take responsibility for their own security (offshore balancing and intervention only if necessary). The United States has red lines and only intervenes in the region if these red lines are endangered. For example, if Israel's security is endangered, the balance of power is disrupted, the enemy dominates energy resources, or shipping, oil, and energy transfer lines are disrupted, the United States intervenes directly. Therefore, the U.S. seeks minimal intervention with maximum profit, like Venezuela. It is also important to note that the Vietnam and Iraq syndromes, which once dominated U.S. foreign policy, are now fading. It is also mentioned in the U.S. National Security document that we act with strikes. Trump, who claimed to oppose war, does not consider such operations as war and claims that such operations have no cost for him and even lead to access to resources. This shows that the United States is still the director of the regional order, but it tries to devolve its responsibility to Israel and the Arabs. This is while there is also a competition among these members themselves to occupy the position of the pillar of the order. For example, if a two-pillar order is to be established, there must be a balance between the two pillars, not that the principle lies with Israel and the rest merely follow it; meaning it [Israel] wants to establish hegemony on behalf of the United States.

In relation to Europe, since the 1950s, one of the fundamental security-defense questions was what position, role, and function Europe has. Of course, Europe was one of the main pillars of NATO alongside the United States. But especially after the 1970s, when détente between the Soviet Union and the United States

took shape, the Europeans felt endangered by the possibility of becoming a subject of trade between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. Therefore, at this time, talk of European independence became more serious. Within the European Union, two groups existed: Atlanticists and Europeanists. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Atlanticism gained a sort of dominance. Therefore, in the Middle East regional order, Europe mostly follows the United States. That is, it is the U.S. that defines a role for Europe. Of course, in economic and technological fields, based on the diversification of relations by the Arabs—which we sometimes refer to as “Hedging”—Europe can play a role in the region. Of course, hedging is meant in the field of economics. Therefore, the European Troika, and mostly France and Britain, because they have been traditional powers in the region, can play a role. However, the only place where Europe and the United States agree is Iran.

Regarding the United States, it is clear; but in principle, does the emerging order create a threat perception for Europe? To which my guess is your answer is negative!

Dr. Dehghani Firoozabadi: No! Especially regarding Israel in the 12-day war and even before that, Europe showed the most supportive positions in both word and deed. Meaning that it provided comprehensive support for this war both within the framework of NATO and individually. Such positions had not been seen before, because one of the characteristics of European foreign policy was that they used to say that in the Middle East, and especially in the Arab-Israeli conflict, Europe mostly takes a stance in support of the Arabs. But recently, European countries, especially Germany, provide unconditional support for Israel. Therefore, they too have concluded that a two-pillar order based on Israeli hegemony or the two pillars mentioned is taking shape, and they have no competition or disagreement with the United States in this regard. The pressure on Iran is also taking shape within this framework. In other words, in the relationship between Iran and Europe, not only are bilateral relations important, but a major part of these relations is focused on the regional order. Europe too has concluded that now might be a historical turning point against the Islamic Republic.

In such an atmosphere, do you think there is essentially a possibility for Iran-West cooperation, specifically Iran and Europe?

Dr. Dehghani Firoozabadi: In the short term, no! I do not want to discuss theoretically; but a constructivist view is perfectly applicable here. When one side takes a friendly gesture and the opposing side gives a hostile response, tension escalates and hostility is not only reproduced but doubled. During the Muscat negotiations, we were attacked while negotiating. Thus, diplomacy became completely discredited. This matter leads some to the conclusion that diplomacy and negotiation, instead of leading to deterrence, are themselves a factor for war. In other words, returning the diplomatic conditions between Iran and the United States to before the 12-day war is itself a difficult project. That we might want to use a new initiative now—I am not saying it is impossible, but it has become much harder. Especially since the opposing side thinks that Iran is in its weakest period and has lost its power levers. Therefore, an agreement means surrender.

Regarding Europe as well, after recent events, especially the reckless support for Iran's internal developments and direct intervention in them, the diplomacy option has truly become harder, but diplomacy never shuts down. You can use diplomacy even in the worst conditions. Here we must distinguish between diplomacy and compromise, and diplomacy and surrender. These are three different concepts. Coincidentally, one of the places where diplomacy becomes a necessity is during crises and war. In these conditions, we need diplomacy more.

Regarding Europe, diplomacy has become harder, meaning it requires more effort. We have tried almost all imaginable diplomatic ways to resolve the problem with the West, both the United States and Europe, and we saw no result or mutual reaction. I have said many times that if the collective West, and especially the United States, recognizes three things, the problem is solvable. First, the existence of the Islamic Republic of Iran, regarding which the situation has worsened; second, the identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran, regarding which the situation has also worsened; and third, Iran's national interests, regarding which there is essentially no acceptance. Historically, I have said many times that if the collective West recognizes these three items, while accepting differences or even enmity, we can have a competitive coexistence

with each other. Meaning you can be enemies with each other but have coexistence together. In my opinion, conditions for achieving a state of coexistence have become much harder.

From Non-Proliferation to Deterrence: The Consequences of U.S. Behavior toward Iran for Global Nuclear Governance

Yousof Azizi¹ |

Introduction

The global regime of preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons has relied more on a fundamental political assumption than on legal norms or technical mechanisms: states that renounce acquiring nuclear weapons will ultimately enjoy greater security and stability. Since the 1960s, this assumption took shape within an order in which the United States played the role of the ultimate guarantor of security, stability, and the enforcement of rules. However, developments in recent years—and especially U.S. behavior toward Iran—have severely eroded this foundation, and its consequences, going beyond the Iranian nuclear file, have placed the entire non-proliferation regime at risk.

The U.S. Nuclear Umbrella: The Main Pillar of Non-Proliferation

U.S. security guarantees over the past eight decades have been one of the principal factors in the success of the non-proliferation regime. These guarantees led many countries—from Europe to East Asia—to refrain from pursuing military nuclear programs. In the absence of this umbrella, a domino effect would begin: even if only one U.S. ally, such as Japan, South Korea, or Germany, decided to build a nuclear bomb, other countries might quickly move in a similar direction, and the entire non-proliferation system could collapse (Cuéllar, Moniz, & O’Sullivan, 2025).

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Countries with “nuclear potential” are not few. Researchers emphasize that countries such as Japan, South Korea, Iran, Germany, Poland, and the Netherlands, from a technical standpoint, can relatively quickly attain nuclear weapons. The main consideration for these countries so far has been political and security-related, not technical. This reality shows that the collapse of trust in international guarantees can rapidly create an incentive for these countries to go nuclear (Das & Epstein, 2025).

Hegemony, Order, and the Nuclear Red Line

After World War II, the United States, as the dominant power in the international system, has always considered preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons one of its red lines. This policy has been pursued not only because of moral concerns but also as a tool for consolidating the existing international order. Nuclear weapons are the only tool that can fundamentally change the balance of power and bring new actors into the club of global decision-makers. Within this framework, the U.S., along with the other permanent members of the Security Council, institutionalized the non-proliferation regime as a kind of “collective self-restraint” that was formalized through the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). In this unwritten bargain, non-nuclear-weapon states refrain from pursuing this option and, in return, benefit from the security, economic, and technological advantages of the U.S.-led order. However, this bargain only has meaning if its guarantor is trustworthy.

Iran, the JCPOA, and the Collapse of Trust

Over the past two decades, Iran’s nuclear file has been one of the most important tests of this order. The U.S. accused Iran of seeking to acquire nuclear weapons and, by imposing the most severe sanctions in history and constantly threatening military action, sought to block this path. Iran, in turn, emphasized its right to peaceful enrichment as an NPT member, and ultimately entered negotiations that led to the “JCPOA.” The JCPOA was a rare example of compromise within the framework of the non-proliferation regime. In exchange for lifting sanctions and recognizing the right to enrichment, unprecedented restrictions were imposed on Iran’s nuclear program. This agreement both addressed U.S.

non-proliferation concerns and showed that diplomacy could replace pressure and threats (Bunn, 2022).

Of course, the JCPOA was not supposed to solve all problems between Iran and the U.S. overnight, but if the agreement had been respected, it could have been a first step toward moving toward negotiations in other areas of mutual interest. Even the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, on 9 April 2015, at the height of the negotiations that three months later led to the JCPOA, noted that if the U.S. adhered to its commitments within a nuclear agreement, the possibility of talking with the U.S. about other issues existed. But what happened in practice was the failure to realize Iran's legitimate economic benefits after the JCPOA, even during the Obama administration. With the Trump administration coming to power in 2017, this Iranian demand was effectively shelved.

The Trump administration's withdrawal from the JCPOA, the reimposition of sanctions under the framework of "maximum pressure," and ultimately the military attack on Iran's nuclear facilities, at a time when the nuclear program was under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency, completely collapsed this framework. The implicit message of this behavior was clear: adherence to an agreement, transparency, and even active negotiation do not in themselves provide any guarantee against the use of force.

Ukraine More Important than Libya and Iraq: The Real Cautionary Example

In common analyses, it is often said that Iran might share the fate of Libya or Iraq as possible scenarios after surrendering to disarmament; however, for Iranian officials, the most instructive cautionary example is not Libya or Iraq, but Ukraine. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine possessed the world's third-largest nuclear arsenal. Nevertheless, in the 1990s, within the framework of the "Budapest Memorandum," it renounced these weapons and, in exchange, received security guarantees from the U.S., the U.K., and Russia. Two decades later, this country was subjected to military aggression by Russia, a nuclear power. Although the West reacted extensively, it consciously refrained from direct military intervention, because of the risk of nuclear confrontation with Russia.

The lesson of Ukraine is simple and ruthless: disarmament, without credible deterrence, can turn a country into a playing field for great powers. In such a situation, people, territory, and resources become bargaining chips (Mearsheimer, 1993). From the perspective of security perceptions, this experience is much more meaningful for Iran than the cases of Libya or Iraq.

The Historical Chain of Distrust

If we place this experience within a historical continuum, the picture becomes clearer: the U.S. invasion of Iraq based on false claims about weapons of mass destruction; the disarmament of Libya and then NATO's military intervention; the signing of the JCPOA and the U.S.'s unilateral withdrawal from it; Russia's invasion of Ukraine; the war in Gaza and the inability or unwillingness of the international community to prevent widespread killing and war crimes; and finally, direct attacks by Israel and the U.S., as two nuclear powers, on Iran. This chain of events, in the view of many experts, is not an exception but a sign of the return of the anarchic logic of power to the international system.

Deterrence in a Lawless World

In realist theories of international relations, states are actors that ultimately seek to maximize security and ensure their survival. When international norms and institutions are weakened, this tendency intensifies. In such an environment, no deterrent tool is considered as effective as nuclear weapons.

The behavior of the Trump administration toward Iran unintentionally reinforced the perception that the only thing that can prevent direct aggression is a cost that the other side is not willing to pay. For this reason, a policy that was supposed to make Iran an "example" may have the opposite result (Einhorn, 2025); in the sense that it may not only lead Iranian decision-makers to take, at any cost, the final step toward achieving nuclear deterrence, but also push other U.S. allies or non-allies, regarding U.S. commitment to following international law and providing security guarantees, toward crossing the red line of producing nuclear weapons.

Beyond Iran: U.S. Allies on the Path to Going Nuclear

The issue is not limited to U.S. enemies or rivals. There is growing evidence that even Washington's traditional allies are seriously rethinking their security reliance (Rose, 2025). According to a Gallup Korea poll in 2024, more than 70 percent of South Koreans supported their country acquiring nuclear weapons. In Japan, Germany, and Poland, public or semi-public debates about nuclear deterrence have intensified. In the Middle East, the Saudi–Pakistani defense agreement is a clear example of seeking alternative options (Gordon & Karlin, 2025). These developments show that the issue is not just “Iran”; it is the collapse of trust in U.S. security guarantees.

China or North Korea?

Contrary to the common perception that sees Iran on the path of the “North Korea model,” China's experience may be more instructive strategically. In the 1960s, at the height of sanctions and hostile U.S. behavior, China achieved nuclear deterrence. Thus, in the 1970s, when the U.S. realized that the military option against China was no longer viable, it chose the path of political and economic engagement with China. Of course, one of the important factors in the normalization of China–U.S. relations was the issue of U.S. containment of the Soviet Union during the Cold War; that is, Washington's top priority at that time was containing the Communist Soviet Union, not Communist China. If the U.S. could create a rift between China and Russia, or at least prevent their strategic alliance, this would itself be a strategic victory in terms of containing the Soviet Union.

Today, the transitional trends in the international order and the onset of a new competition between the U.S. and China—some call it a “second Cold War”—may push the U.S. toward engaging with Iran, provided that the military option against Iran is taken off the U.S. table. This is possible only if Iran has achieved nuclear deterrence.

The nuclear trajectory of North Korea also has similarities with Iran's nuclear issue. The nuclear agreements between North Korea and the Clinton administration were set aside by the Bush administration, and when Pyongyang saw the bad faith and excessive demands of the American side, as well as the support of

China and Russia for itself, it withdrew from the NPT and began producing and testing nuclear weapons. This move led the UN Security Council, with the cooperation of all its permanent members, to impose severe sanctions on North Korea.

The important point is that, in a transitional international order—especially after North Korea’s extensive cooperation with Russia in the Ukraine war and China’s security considerations in its geopolitical competition with the U.S.—even the Security Council’s consensus against Pyongyang has cracked. Today, Russia and China practically ignore UN sanctions against North Korea and have accepted this country as a nuclear power. From Iran’s perspective and in light of its historical experience, this reality is itself a cautionary lesson.

Weakening Institutions, Strengthening Proliferation

The weakening of coordination among the permanent members of the Security Council and the discrediting of institutions such as the International Atomic Energy Agency create an environment more conducive to proliferation. When a country under the strictest supervision becomes the target of military attack, the message for others is clear: cooperation and transparency do not necessarily bring security. Under such conditions, even if governments do not publicly declare their nuclear ambitions, one cannot ignore the emergence of clandestine programs or latent capabilities. The growing inclination in Iranian public opinion and expert circles to discuss the necessity of nuclear deterrence—regardless of the official policy of the government—and the efforts of some regional countries to obtain a nuclear umbrella are indicators of this trend.

West Asia and the Deadlock of a “Weapons-of-Mass-Destruction-Free Zone”

In West Asia, this crisis of trust takes on a more acute form. For decades, the idea of a “weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone” has been raised as a legal and political solution for curbing the arms race. A noteworthy point is that despite all the deep differences between Iran and Egypt after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the two countries have agreed on continued support for establishing a weapons-of-mass-destruction-free zone in the Middle East.

In meetings and statements of international organizations, Tehran and Cairo have repeatedly emphasized a common demand: forcing Israel to dismantle its

arsenal and accept the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency over its nuclear facilities. This position did not stem from ideological alignment but from a shared understanding of structural imbalance in the region.

However, developments in the past two years have effectively brought this path to a dead end (Pollack, 2025). Israel's direct attack on Iran, this country's reckless behavior in targeting several Arab countries, and, most importantly, the unconditional support of the West, especially the U.S., for Israel, carry a clear message: not only does Israel pay no price for its policies, it is also immune from any real pressure. Under such circumstances, imagining that Israel would be willing to place its nuclear capability under IAEA supervision is more of a wish than a political strategy. The reality is that Tel Aviv, relying on its political and military immunity, has no incentive to accept nuclear constraints. It is here that the issue of Iran enters a qualitative stage. In a region where a nuclear-armed actor outside any supervisory framework enjoys full U.S. support, the continuation of asymmetric conditions means accepting permanent vulnerability (Waltz, 2012). In the absence of credible deterrence, Iran can be continually subjected to Israeli threats—threats that are not only military but also political and economic.

Worse still, this situation can push the U.S., under pressure from the Israel lobby and the logic of “defending an ally,” toward direct or indirect confrontation with Iran. From this perspective, the discussion of nuclear deterrence for Iran is not an ideological project but a response to a geopolitical reality: the collapse of a guaranteed order, the normalization of allies going nuclear, and the immunity of a hostile nuclear actor in the region (Geranmayeh, 2024).

Conclusion: A Worn-Out Order, Dangerous Choices

U.S. behavior toward Iran—especially during the Trump era—not only weakened diplomacy and the rule of global laws but also undermined one of the main pillars of the non-proliferation regime, namely trust. In a world where security guarantees are not reliable, the temptation of nuclear deterrence, whether actual or potential, increases. If unchecked, this trend could drag the international system into a “new nuclear age” in which not only U.S. rivals but also its allies will seek ultimate security options. The experience of two decades

of negotiations, threats, and war over Iran's nuclear program has turned crossing the nuclear threshold into an unavoidable option for Iran.

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The Internal Dynamics of European Policy Toward Israel: From Convergence to Strategic Fragmentation

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Introduction

The European Union, which presents itself as a normative power and a promoter of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law at the international level, has in recent decades pursued a dual and contradictory policy toward Israel. After October 2023 and the beginning of the Gaza crisis, this duality intensified and revealed deep divisions among the member states of the European Union. While some European countries continue to emphasize unconditional support for Israel, others have called for the imposition of sanctions, the suspension of arms exports, and even the recognition of the State of Palestine.

This transformation in Europe's policy toward Israel reflects not only structural changes in the international order, but also the internal tensions of the European Union in defining its strategic identity, its specific place in the international system, and the extent of its dependence on or independence from the policies of the United States of America. Based on three main axes—namely internal European divisions, the classification of European countries according to their approaches toward Israel, and the impact of these disagreements on Europe's strategic autonomy—this article examines the complexities of European policy toward Israel.

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1. Aspects of Disagreement and Division Among European Countries

1.1. Reaction to the Gaza War and Human Rights Violations

Following the attack of 7 October 2023 and the start of Israel's large-scale military operation in Gaza, the European Union was unable to adopt a unified position. According to a European Commission report in November 2023, countries such as Germany and Austria, interpreting Israel's right to preserve its security as a "reason of state," emphasized its "right to self-defense," while countries such as Spain, Ireland, and Belgium called for an immediate ceasefire and condemned Israel's military actions (Beyond Staatsraison, 2025).

In March 2024, Spain announced that it had completely halted arms exports to Israel, citing "violations of international humanitarian law by Israel." In October 2025, in reaction to the genocide in Gaza, the Spanish Parliament also passed a law imposing a complete arms embargo on Israel, proposed by the country's Prime Minister, Pedro Sánchez, with 178 votes in favor and 169 against. Under this law, the sale of weapons, dual-use technologies, and military equipment to Israel was permanently banned (Hume, 2025). Germany and the Czech Republic, however, continued their arms exports to Israel. According to statistics from the Stockholm Peace Research Institute, Germany supplied more than thirty percent of Israel's total arms imports in 2023, while France and Spain severely restricted their exports to Israel (SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, 2026). This division reached its peak at the meeting of the EU Foreign Affairs Council in February 2024, where Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, stated that "the European Union is unable to adopt a common position on Gaza because of deep internal disagreements" (Foreign Affairs Council, 2024).

1.2. Recognition of the State of Palestine

One of the clearest manifestations of intra-European division is the position of different countries regarding the recognition of the State of Palestine. In May 2024, Spain, Ireland, and Norway simultaneously announced that they recognized the State of Palestine. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez described this move as a necessary step toward achieving the two-state solution and ending the occupation (Hume, 2025). This decision provoked strong reac-

tions among European countries. Germany, Austria, and the Czech Republic strongly condemned the move, calling it unilateral and disruptive to peace negotiations. France and Belgium adopted a middle position and stated that recognition of Palestine should take place at the appropriate time and within the framework of the peace process. By the end of 2024, nine EU member states had recognized the State of Palestine, while 18 others had refrained from doing so (Feld, 2025).

1.3. Economic Sanctions and Settlements

Another point of disagreement among European countries concerns Israeli settlement-building in the West Bank and sanctions on products manufactured in these settlements. In 2015, the European Union approved guidelines according to which products made in Israeli settlements must be labeled separately (Interpretative Notice on indication of origin of goods from the territories occupied by Israel since June 1967, 2015, p. 3). However, the degree of compliance with these guidelines has varied among different countries. France and Belgium fully implement these guidelines, while Hungary and Romania practically ignore them. Under the leadership of Viktor Orbán, Hungary openly supports Israel's policies and blocks any economic sanctions against Israel. For example, in November 2023, Hungary vetoed a joint EU statement condemning Israeli settlement-building (Hungary blocks EU declaration on Israel-Palestine ceasefire, 2021).

1.4. The Cases of the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice

When, in May 2024, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court requested arrest warrants for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant on charges of war crimes, the reactions of European countries were completely different. Belgium, Ireland, and Spain quickly supported the move and emphasized the independence of the Court. By contrast, Germany adopted an ambivalent position and, despite stressing respect for the ruling of the International Criminal Court, criticized the issuance of the arrest warrants. Hungary and the Czech Republic openly described the Court's ruling as "political" and invited Netanyahu to Budapest to demonstrate that they would not enforce the Court's warrant (Israel's PM Netanyahu to Visit Hungary despite ICC Arrest Warrant,

2025). This issue created serious tensions within the European Union, because all member states are committed to enforcing the rulings of the International Criminal Court.

As another example, in response to the genocide case filed by South Africa against Israel at the International Court of Justice, European countries adopted different positions. Ireland, Belgium, Spain, and Slovenia supported the case and even entered the proceedings as third parties, while Germany officially defended Israel.

Area of Disagreement	Countries Supporting Israel	Countries Critical of Israel	Key Factor of Disagreement
Gaza war	Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary: emphasis on the right to self-defense	Spain, Ireland, Belgium, and Slovenia: condemnation of human rights violations	Definition of legitimate self-defense versus war crimes
Arms exports	Germany and the Czech Republic: continuation of exports	Spain and Belgium: complete halt to exports	Interpretation of moral responsibility
Recognition of the State of Palestine	Germany, Austria, and the Czech Republic: strong opposition to recognition of the State of Palestine	Spain, Ireland, Norway, Slovenia, and Malta: recognition of the State of Palestine	Two-state solution
Sanctions on settlement products	Hungary and Romania: non-implementation of the guidelines	France and Belgium: full implementation of the sanctions	Interpretation of EU law
Filing war crimes complaints against Israel at the International Court of Justice	Hungary and the Czech Republic: opposition to the complaint and invitation to Netanyahu	Ireland, Belgium, and Spain: full support for the complaint	Judicial independence versus political relations
International Criminal Court case	Germany: defense of Israel	Ireland, Belgium, Spain, and Slovenia: support for South Africa	Interpretation of the Genocide Convention

Area of Disagree- ment	Countries Support- ing Israel	Countries Critical of Israel	Key Factor of Disagreement
Boycott, divestment, and sanctions	Germany and Austria: anti-boycott resolu- tions	Ireland: implicit support for the right to boycott	Freedom of expression versus combating an- tisemitism

Table 1. Areas of disagreement among European countries regarding Israel

2. Classification of European Countries Based on Their Approaches Toward Israel

2.1. Group One: Israel’s Strategic Supporters

This group includes Germany, Austria, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, which support Israel unconditionally for historical, strategic, or ideological reasons. Among these countries, Germany, due to its historical responsibility for the Holocaust, regards Israel’s security as part of its national identity. In November 2023, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz emphasized that Israel’s security is part of the German state’s reason for existence (Policy statement by Olaf Scholz, 2023). The basis of this position is the policy that Angela Merkel announced in the Israeli Knesset in 2008, which became known as the “famous reason of state.” It should be noted that Germany is the largest exporter of arms to Israel in Europe and, since 2023, has significantly increased its arms exports. In addition to Germany, Hungary under the leadership of Viktor Orbán is one of Israel’s closest allies in Europe. At the level of the European Union, this country blocks any criticism of Israel, and it is the only European country that has moved its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Orbán’s approach is simultaneously the result of ideological convergence with right-wing nationalist governments and a strategy of countering Western European influence in Hungary’s domestic affairs. Austria, too, due to its shared history with Germany during the Nazi era and the rise of right-wing coalition governments, is considered a strong supporter of Israel. In 2024, this country vetoed the European Union’s plan to sanction Israeli settlements.

This group of countries is mainly influenced by pro-Israel lobbies, U.S. pressure, and domestic concerns regarding Islamophobia and nationalism. They also

view support for Israel as a tool for alignment with the United States and the preservation of transatlantic relations.

2.2. Group Two: Supporters of the “Two-State Solution” and Balance

France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands fall into the category of supporters of the “two-state solution” and attempt to maintain a balance between support for Israel’s security and criticism of its policies. France, as a traditional power in the Middle East and with a significant Jewish and Muslim population, holds a complex position regarding the Gaza crisis. In October 2024, French President Emmanuel Macron called for a halt to arms exports to Israel and justified this position by the need for a political solution. France has also supported initiatives aimed at the “two-state solution” at the United Nations and has placed recognition of Palestine on its agenda.

Belgium, too, given Brussels’s status as the capital of the European Union, has adopted a more balanced position on this matter. In January 2024, Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo announced that Belgium supports the case brought before the International Court of Justice against Israel (Belgium Joins ICJ Genocide Case Against Israel, 2025). This group of countries acts more on the basis of the European Union’s foundational values in the areas of human rights and the rule of law at the international level, and is less influenced by U.S. pressure. They seek to play a mediating role in the region and support diplomatic solutions.

2.3. Group Three: Active Critics and Supporters of Palestinian Rights

Spain, Ireland, Slovenia, Belgium, and Malta belong in this category. These countries have actively defended Palestinian rights and called for sanctions against Israel. Ireland, in view of its colonial history and its sympathy for liberation struggles, has always been among the strongest supporters of Palestine in Europe. For example, in April 2024, Irish Prime Minister Leo Varadkar stated that the occupation of Palestine bears many similarities to the occupation of Ireland (Donmez, 2024). Ireland has also called for broad economic sanctions against Israel.

In addition, Spain under the leadership of Pedro Sánchez has also been at the forefront of recognizing the State of Palestine and condemning Israel. In May 2024, Sánchez declared that Spain cannot remain silent in the face of the killing of civilians. Spain has also supported the complaints filed against Israel at the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court.

This group of countries acts more than any other in accordance with the European Union’s foundational values, European public opinion, and international law. They are the least affected by pro-Israel lobbies and U.S. pressure, and act more on the basis of ethical and legal principles and Europe’s long-term interests.

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Cate- gory	Countries	Characteristics	Motivations	Degree of Alignment with the U.S.
Strategic sup- port- ers	Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, and Poland	Unconditional sup- port, arms exports, opposition to sanc- tions, and support in international fora	Historical responsi- bility (Germany and Austria), right-wing politics (Hungary), security dependence on the U.S. (Eastern Europe), and strong domestic lobbies	Very high
Mod- erates	France, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Italy, and Greece	Balancing between Israel’s security and Palestinian rights, cautious criticism, support for the two- state solution, and implementation of some EU guidelines	Preserving relations with the Middle East, pressure of public opinion, efforts at mediation, and the presence of significant Jewish and Muslim com- munities	Medium

Category	Countries	Characteristics	Motivations	Degree of Alignment with the U.S.
Active critics	Spain, Ireland, Slovenia, Norway, Malta, Portugal, and the Scandinavian countries	Recognition of Palestine, suspension of arms exports, support for international cases, and explicit criticism of Israel	Anti-colonial history, commitment to human rights, strong public opinion pressure, and independence from the U.S.	Low

Table 2 – Classification of European countries in relation to Israel

2.4. The Geographic Divide: Western versus Eastern Europe

One of the important dimensions of the divide among EU member states is the difference in approach between Western and Eastern European countries. Eastern European countries, especially Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland, are more inclined to support Israel. This inclination can be attributed to several factors:

Because of their experience under communism, these countries have greater security concerns and see Israel as a strategic ally in confronting security threats; Due to their greater dependence on U.S. support against Russia, they tend to align their foreign policy with Washington;

Right-wing nationalist parties that hold power in these countries are ideologically aligned with right-wing governments in Israel.

By contrast, Western European countries, particularly Spain, Ireland, and the Scandinavian states, adopt a more critical stance toward Israel. With stronger civil societies, publics more sensitive to human rights, and greater independence from the United States, these countries act more on the basis of international law and European values.

3. The Impact of European Disagreements over Israel on Europe's Strategic Autonomy

3.1. Europe's Strategic Autonomy: From Concept to Reality

In recent years, the concept of strategic autonomy has become one of the central themes of the European Union's foreign policy discourse. This concept, which has been especially emphasized by the French government and President Emmanuel Macron, refers to Europe's ability to define and pursue its interests independently of external powers, particularly the United States. In the "EU Global Strategy," published in 2016 and updated in 2022, the need for strategic autonomy in an interconnected world is underscored. This strategy comprises four main dimensions: defense and security autonomy, economic and technological autonomy, autonomy in foreign policy and diplomacy, and finally normative and value-based autonomy.

However, the Gaza crisis has shown that the European Union is still far from realizing strategic autonomy. Its inability to adopt a unified stance, its susceptibility to pressure from Washington, and the dominance of short-term national interests over long-term European interests all point to serious challenges on Europe's path to strategic autonomy.

3.2. Support for Israel and Its Contradiction with European Values

One of the most important challenges that support for Israel poses for Europe's strategic autonomy is its contradiction with the EU's fundamental values. The European Union presents itself as a promoter of human rights, democracy, and international rule of law. These values are explicitly cited in the Lisbon Treaty (2009) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2000). Yet support for policies such as Israel's occupation of the West Bank, illegal settlement-building, the blockade of Gaza, and widespread violations of international humanitarian law clearly contradicts these values. This contradiction undermines Europe's credibility as a normative power and fuels accusations of double standards against the continent.

Public opinion is one of the principles of democracy. Decision-makers must adopt the right stance before their voters, because their political future depends

on these positions. However, crises such as the Gaza crisis can create tensions in society and contribute to its polarization.

For decades, the European Union has portrayed itself as a mediating actor committed to the two-state solution, an advocate of peaceful solutions, and a defender of human rights. Yet public opinion across Europe paints a fragmented picture. Public reactions are more emotional than institutional in origin. Some people (especially in academic settings, where students pressure their universities to cut ties with Israel and formally recognize the Palestinian cause) strongly support Palestinian rights; others, however, emphasize Israel's security concerns. In the latter case, historical and religious discourse carries more weight.

This divergence among a wide spectrum of views complicates Brussels's efforts to present a single position. In reality, current EU policies toward Israel do not align with European public opinion, which in itself constitutes a threat to the democratic legitimacy of the Union's foreign policy.

3.3. Dependence on the United States and the Limits of Autonomy

One of the key obstacles to Europe's strategic autonomy regarding Israel is its dependence on the United States in the fields of security, defense, and intelligence. Most European countries, being NATO members, are heavily reliant on the U.S. security umbrella. This dependence leads many European states to align their foreign policy with Washington, even when such alignment conflicts with European interests and values.

Germany, as Europe's largest economy and the United States' closest ally in Europe, plays a pivotal role in this dependence. Germany's unconditional support for Israel practically prevents Europe from adopting an independent and unified position. In the EU Foreign Affairs Council meetings, Germany has repeatedly blocked the issuance of critical statements about Israel.

Nonetheless, some European countries, especially France, are trying to gain greater independence from the United States. In September 2024, Emmanuel Macron declared at the UN General Assembly that Europe should not follow the United States but must have its own independent voice (Kuttab, 2025). However, France alone cannot alter the overall direction of EU policy.

3.4. The Impact of Lobbies and Domestic Pressures

Another factor constraining Europe’s strategic autonomy is the influence of pro-Israel lobbies and domestic political pressures. In many European countries, powerful lobbying groups support Israeli policies and influence policymaking. In Germany, groups such as the “German-Israeli Association” and the “Central Council of Jews in Germany” play a significant role in shaping Germany’s policy toward Israel.

Moreover, accusations of antisemitism are often used as a tool to suppress criticism of Israeli policies, thereby restricting the political space for adopting critical positions (Kloke, 2021, p. 11). The following figure shows the most important pro-Israel lobbies in Europe:

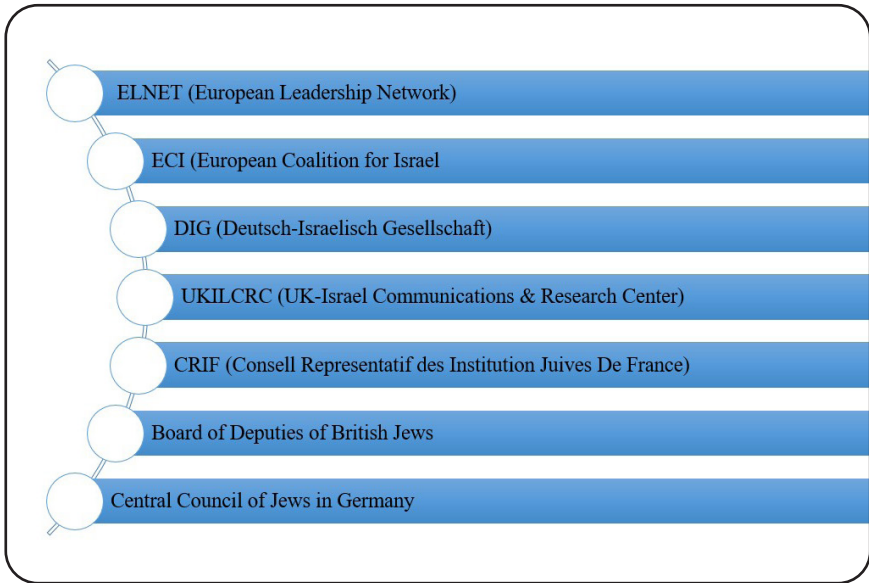


Figure 1 – The most important pro-Israel lobbies in Europe

At the EU level as well, lobbying groups such as the “European Coalition for Israel” seek to influence the decisions of the European Parliament and the European Commission. These groups often cooperate with American lobbies such as AIPAC and have created extensive influence networks. Their methods of operation and influence are summarized in the table below.

Method of Influence	Explanation	Example
Educational trips to Israel	Taking members of parliament, journalists, and military officers to Israel	Annual trips of 100 members of the European Parliament to Israel
Security conferences	Organizing events in national parliaments	The annual EINET conference in Brussels
Think tanks and research reports	Producing scholarly content to justify Israel's policies	Reports by the BESA Center
Public relations and media	Media campaigns and image-crisis management	Anti-boycott, divestment, and sanctions campaigns
Direct parliamentary lobbying	Direct meetings with lawmakers	Access to foreign affairs committees
Controlling the narrative and combating "anti-Zionism"	Accusing critics of Israel of antisemitism; using the IHRA definition of antisemitism	–
Support for friendly politicians	Electoral contributions and political backing	Support for right-wing candidates in Europe
Elite networking	Building ties among security and military officials	Confidential meetings with NATO officers

Table 3 – Methods of influence used by pro-Israel lobbies in Europe

3.5. Opportunities for Strategic Autonomy

Despite the aforementioned challenges, the Gaza crisis has also created opportunities to strengthen Europe's strategic autonomy:

The widening gap between Europe and the United States on Israel policy can serve as an incentive for Europe to adopt a more independent stance. The Trump administration, and even the Biden administration, have continued unconditional support for Israel, while European public opinion strongly criticizes this approach.

The decision by some European countries to recognize Palestine and support international cases against Israel shows that Europe can act independently of the United States when there is political will. If this trend expands, it could gradually lead to a unified European stance defined on the basis of European values and interests.

Changes in the international system and the rise of new powers such as China and India provide more room for Europe to play a more active role globally without complete dependence on the United States. In recent years, the EU has developed strategies to diversify its relations and reduce dependence on the U.S., which can also be applied to the Middle East.

Conclusion

An examination of the internal dynamics of European policy toward Israel shows that the European Union is at a critical and decisive juncture. Deep intra-European divisions over the Gaza war, the recognition of Palestine, economic sanctions, and international cases against Israel reflect fundamental tensions in Europe's identity, values, and strategic position.

European countries can be divided into three main groups: strategic supporters of Israel (Germany, Hungary, Austria, Czech Republic), advocates of balance and the "two-state solution" (France, Belgium, the Netherlands), and active critics and supporters of Palestinian rights (Spain, Ireland, Slovenia). This categorization has been shaped by factors such as history, geography, ideology, dependence on the United States, and lobbying pressure.

The third group of countries, which includes Spain, Ireland, and some Scandinavian states, is the most aligned with the EU's foundational values, European public opinion, and international law. Their approach is not only more defensible ethically and legally, but also more consistent with Europe's long-term interests in the Middle East and its international standing as a normative power.

Unconditional support for Israel, pursued by Germany and some Eastern European countries, not only contradicts EU values but also constitutes a serious obstacle to Europe's strategic autonomy. This approach undermines Europe's credibility as a normative power, deepens the gap between political elites and public opinion, and turns Europe into a follower of Washington's policies.

To achieve genuine strategic autonomy, the European Union must be able to define and pursue its interests independently of the United States. This requires overcoming internal divisions, strengthening joint decision-making mechanisms, reducing dependence on the U.S. in security and defense, and resisting pressure from lobbies and vested-interest groups.

The Gaza crisis is an opportunity for Europe to redefine its identity and role in the international system. If Europe can adopt a unified and independent stance based on its own values—human rights, international rule of law, justice, and peace—it will not only contribute to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also take a major step toward strategic autonomy and becoming an independent global power. Otherwise, the European Union will gradually turn into a marginal actor in the international system, one that neither has the capacity to influence global developments nor the credibility to promote its own values.

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Iran and Europe's Energy Security: Capacities for Cooperation and Geopolitical Realities

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Introduction

Energy security in the third decade of the twentyfirst century has become one of the most central components of the European Union's national and economic security. The war in Ukraine and the collapse of the traditional pattern of Europe's energy dependence on Russia, combined with intensifying geopolitical competition in the Middle East and along maritime routes, demonstrated that energy is no longer merely an economic commodity but has become a strategic instrument for exerting influence, deterrence, and political pressure. In such an environment, the European Union is compelled to strike a fragile balance among three sometimes conflicting objectives—security of supply, affordability, and the green transition.

In this context, the Islamic Republic of Iran, as a country possessing one of the world's largest oil and gas reserves and controlling vital energy transit choke-points, occupies a complex and multidimensional position in the equations of Europe's energy security. On the one hand, Iran can potentially serve as a source of supply, a transit corridor, and even a partner in the energy transition (through renewable energy and green hydrogen). On the other hand, by virtue of its geopolitical, military, and cyber capabilities, it is also capable of acting as a disruptive actor that could threaten the security of Europe's energy supply. This duality turns Iran into an actor that can neither be ignored nor easily integrated into conventional frameworks of cooperation.

This report aims to clarify Iran's dual role and assess its implications for Europe's energy security. First, the structural condition of the European Union's energy

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security in the postUkraine war era and the new pattern of its dependencies are examined. Next, Iran's capacities and limitations in the areas of energy resources, transit routes, and clean energy are analyzed. The report then explores potential areas of energy cooperation between Iran and Europe as well as the obstacles facing such cooperation. Finally, focusing on Iran's disruptive instruments of influence, it demonstrates how Iran could become one of the determining variables in Europe's energy security calculations. The ultimate goal of this analysis is to provide a realistic and strategic understanding of Iran's position in the future of Europe's energy security—beyond purely economic or normative perspectives and aligned with the logic of power and geopolitics.

1. The Structural Situation of Europe's Energy Security

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Europe's energy security faced a severe test. Now, by the end of 2025, although the European Union has achieved a degree of relative stability in gas markets, this stability remains fragile and dependent on external geopolitical variables. In recent years, despite the increasing share of clean energy in Europe's energy mix, more than 67 percent of the European Union's energy is still supplied by fossil fuels. At the same time, domestic gas production covers only about 10 percent of the Union's needs (European Commission, 2026). Under these conditions, dependence on imports remains high. For example, in 2023 the EU's energy import dependency rate was about 58 percent, and this situation has continued in 2025 despite changes in trade partners (Eurostat, 2025).

In general, one of the most prominent characteristics of this period (following the start of the Ukraine war) has been the shift in the geography of Europe's gas supply. Now, three years after the start of the war, Russia's share of total European gas imports has fallen to 12 percent as a result of warrelated energy sanctions. Prior to the war, nearly 45 percent of the European Union's natural gas consumption was supplied by Russia. Accordingly, for example, the EU's pipeline imports from Russia declined from about 137 billion cubic meters in 2021 to 31.6 billion cubic meters in 2024. Meanwhile, Norway, supplying 30 percent of the EU's total imported gas, has become the largest gas supplier to the Union (Urbasos Arbeloa, 2024).

With the reduction of pipeline imports from Russia, LNG imports increased rapidly. The share of LNG in total EU gas imports jumped from 20 percent in 2021 to 37 percent in 2024. In 2025, LNG import volumes reached 35 billion cubic meters, showing a significant increase compared to the previous year. Among Europe's LNG suppliers, the United States ranks first with a share of about 58 percent (European Commission, 15 January 2026). In addition, North African countries (Algeria and Libya) supply about 18 percent, Qatar about 6 percent, and Azerbaijan—through the Southern Gas Corridor—about 7 percent of Europe's gas needs (European Commission, 2026).

Main gas suppliers of the European Union (estimate for 2025)	Share of total imports (percent)	Type of transport
Norway	30	Pipeline
United States	19	LNG
Algeria	14	Pipeline
Russia (total)	12	Pipeline and LNG
Qatar	8	LNG
Republic of Azerbaijan	7	Pipeline

Table 1 – Main Gas Suppliers of the European Union (Source: Eurostat, 2025)

Following the outbreak of the Ukraine war, Russian oil imports also declined due to sanctions and were replaced by imports from countries such as Norway, the United States, and Middle Eastern states.

Overall, one of the most important lessons of the Ukraine war for Europe was the need to diversify its energy partners in order to reduce the likelihood of political pressure from one or several supplier countries. As a result, Europe actively sought new sources of natural gas (especially LNG) and oil in different parts of the world. Consequently, in addition to Central Asia and the Caucasus, countries along the southern shores of the Persian Gulf—such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Iraq—have also played a key role in supplying oil and gas to the global market, including Europe.

2. Iran’s Capacities and Challenges in the Energy Sector

In the emerging equations of regional and global energy security, Iran possesses three complementary strategic advantages that together strengthen the country’s potential position.

First is the abundance of fossil resources, including vast oil and gas reserves that enable stable and longterm energy supply. In terms of resources, Iran in 2025 continues to be recognized as a global energy giant whose potential capabilities have not fully materialized due to technological and sanctionsrelated constraints. According to updated data, Iran possesses 208.6 billion barrels of proven crude oil reserves, ranking third in the world (11.8 percent of total global reserves). In the field of natural gas, Iran holds 34 trillion cubic meters of reserves, placing it second after Russia. Despite these enormous resources, Iran’s production faces serious challenges. In 2024, Iran’s oil production reached about 4.6 million barrels per day, but the annual reserve depletion rate is only 0.81 percent. In the gas sector, Iran produced about 292 billion cubic meters in 2023, making it the world’s thirdlargest producer; however, a severe imbalance between production and domestic consumption has paralyzed the country’s export capacity. Iran’s gas paradox lies in the fact that despite possessing 17 percent of global reserves, the country’s share of global gas trade remains negligible. In fact, during the winter of 2025 Iran relied on gas imports from Russia and Turkmenistan to meet domestic demand (Hatami et al., 2025).

Iran’s hydrocarbon indicators (2024–2025)	Value / Rank	Notes
Proven oil reserves — 208.6 billion barrels	Rank 3	24 percent of Middle East reserves
Proven gas reserves — 34 trillion cubic meters	Rank 2	17 percent of global reserves
Crude oil production — 4.6 million barrels per day	Rank 6	Increase after 2021
Natural gas production — 292 billion cubic meters	Rank 3	Imbalance during peak consumption

Table 2 – Iran’s Hydrocarbon Indicators

Second, Iran's exceptional geopolitical location along major energy transit routes makes it a natural, relatively short, and cost-efficient corridor between the Middle East, Central Asia, and European consumer markets. Iran has several potential and strategic routes for energy transmission to Europe that could transform it into a major regional energy hub, although the realization of these routes depends on overcoming political, sanctions-related, and infrastructural obstacles. The first option is the Iran–Iraq–Syria route, known in energy literature as the “Friendship Pipeline.” This proposed pipeline would transport gas from Iran's major southern fields (including South Pars) through Iraq and Syria to the Mediterranean coast. From there, the pipeline could connect to the European gas network and transfer up to about 110 million cubic meters of gas annually. This multithousand-kilometer project is one of the most ambitious proposed routes for transporting Iranian energy to Europe and, if implemented, could serve as an alternative to traditional Russian pipeline routes. However, it has so far remained only at the proposal stage and has not made significant practical progress.

Another option is the Iran–Turkey route, which connects Iran's longest gas networks to Turkey's gas infrastructure and from there to Europe. Economic studies have shown that in terms of economic value this route is one of the best options for exporting Iranian gas to Europe, as it could yield positive returns with appropriate investment and facilitate connection to European gas corridors (Sadeghi et al., 2017). In addition to these two main routes, Iran has also played a regional role in the transit of Central Asian gas to Europe. For example, agreements have been reached for the transit of Turkmen gas through Iranian territory to Turkey. These arrangements demonstrate that Iran can function as a transit corridor for neighboring countries' energy resources and support regional transmission networks, although the direct export of Iranian gas to Europe remains limited and is currently connected mainly to the Turkish and Iraqi markets (Associated Press, 2025).

Third, Iran possesses significant potential for the production of clean energy, particularly solar energy. Given the country's exceptional climatic conditions and the European Union's policy focus on the green transition, this could emerge as a future-oriented advantage in Iran's energy interactions. With the EU emphasizing the expansion of clean energy and the reduction of greenhouse

gas emissions, renewable energy is expected to play a growing role in the bloc's future energy security. European countries have therefore set ambitious targets for increasing the share of solar and wind power in their energy mix. Within this framework, Iran—with its natural and climatic advantages—could play an important role in the production of clean energy. With an average of more than 300 sunny days per year, Iran is considered one of the regions with very high solar radiation levels. This advantage significantly enhances the feasibility of photovoltaic projects in the country.

Despite Iran's considerable capacities in the three aforementioned areas, the effective utilization of these advantages faces a series of structural, institutional, and geopolitical challenges. In the fossil fuel sector, although Iran possesses vast oil and gas reserves, the lack of investment and the deterioration of upstream and downstream infrastructure—due to sanctions pressure, high domestic consumption, and extensive energy subsidies—have effectively limited the country's export capacity, with a significant share of production devoted to domestic needs. In the field of energy transmission, international sanctions, regional geopolitical risks, the absence of stable foreign investment, and Iran's lack of integration into international energy networks have prevented the realization of major pipeline projects and hindered Iran's emergence as a regional energy transit hub. In the renewable and solar energy sector, despite extremely favorable climatic potential, challenges such as financial constraints, instability in supportive policies, and limited access to advanced technologies, and weaknesses in electricity grid infrastructure, and unattractive economic frameworks for domestic and foreign investors have slowed the pace of development. Overall, the gap between Iran's capabilities and the realization of those capabilities in the energy sector is not due to a lack of resources but rather the result of a set of institutional, economic, and political constraints. Without structural reforms and improved international engagement, these constraints will continue to prevent Iran's energy potential from translating into real power within regional and global energy security equations.

3. Areas of Cooperation and Interaction Between Iran and Europe in the Energy Sector

Geopolitical developments in recent years—particularly the Ukraine crisis—have turned energy security into one of the European Union's strategic priorities. Reducing dependence on high-risk sources, diversifying energy suppliers, and simultaneously advancing the transition toward low-carbon energy form the core framework of Europe's energy policy. In this context, Iran, as the holder of one of the world's largest oil and gas reserves and possessing considerable potential in renewable energy, could—if the necessary political and economic conditions are provided—become an important actor in Europe's energy equations. This section, focusing on the energy needs and challenges of the European Union as well as Iran's capabilities, examines the areas in which mutually beneficial cooperation and interaction between Iran and Europe could take place.

3.1 Areas of Cooperation in Natural Gas and Hydrocarbon Products

Cooperation with Europe in the natural gas and hydrocarbon products sector could be structured around three key axes:

3.1.1 Infrastructure modernization and reduction of energy losses:

One of the most attractive areas of cooperation is the transfer of technology aimed at reducing gas flaring and increasing pressure in major fields such as South Pars. In 2024, Iran wasted approximately 20 billion cubic meters of gas—equivalent to about 8 percent of the country's total production—through flaring. European engineering companies, equipped with advanced technologies for flare gas recovery and pressureboosting compressors, could participate in projects whose costs would be financed through the value of the gas saved. Beyond economic benefits, this approach also aligns with the European Union's environmental objectives for reducing carbon emissions.

3.1.2 Gas swap mechanisms and Iran's role as a regional hub:

Given current limitations on direct exports, the “swap” mechanism represents one of the most practical solutions for energy exports. Recent agreements among Iran, Turkmenistan, and Turkey in 2024 and 2025 demonstrate the significant potential of this route. Under this model, Iran can receive Turkmen gas in the north and deliver an equivalent amount through the Old Turk pipeline or via

connections to the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) at its western borders to Europe.

3.1.3 Development of the LNG industry and export of refined products:

Although Iran currently lacks operational liquefied natural gas export terminals, completing unfinished projects with the participation of European investors could connect Iran to global gas markets. Europe, which increased its LNG imports in 2024, is seeking to diversify its supply sources in order to reduce dependence on the U.S. market, which is influenced by political fluctuations.

3.2 Cooperation in Renewable Energy and Green Hydrogen

Europe's transition toward a netzero carbon economy has created enormous demand for renewable energy and green hydrogen. Due to an average solar radiation level of 4.5 to 5.5 kilowatthours per square meter and more than 300 sunny days per year across twothirds of its territory, Iran is one of the best locations in the world for largescale solar power plants (Mordor Intelligence, 2026).

3.2.1 Production potential and SATBA targets:

In recent years, the Iranian government has set ambitious goals for expanding renewable energy capacity. The target of achieving 30,000 megawatts of renewable capacity by 2030 presents a unique opportunity for European companies active in solar panels, wind turbines, and energy storage systems (Mordor Intelligence, 2026).

3.2.2 Production of green hydrogen for the European market:

Green hydrogen is considered the backbone of Europe's future industrial system. Technical estimates in 2025 indicate that the levelized cost of hydrogen in southern Iran—due to its high combined solarwind capacity—could reach between 3and3 and 3and4 per kilogram by 2030, making it highly competitive compared with production within Europe (Soltani Sehat, 2025).

3.3 Optimization of Energy Consumption and Efficiency in Industry

Due to heavy subsidies and aging industrial machinery, Iran has one of the highest energy consumption intensities in the world. The annual cost of energy subsidies in Iran is estimated at around \$70 billion, which has led to wasteful

consumption patterns. Cooperation with Europe in this area could take place through Energy Service Companies (ESCOs) and Energy Performance Contracts (EPC).

3.3.1 Cooperation with the Wuppertal Institute and joint projects:

The history of scientific cooperation between Iran and Germany—such as projects conducted by the Wuppertal Institute since 2002—demonstrates the high potential for transferring technical knowledge in areas such as building retrofitting, industrial standards, and smart electricity grid management. Even during periods of political tension, such interactions have served as channels for maintaining diplomatic relations in the energy sector (Souhankar et al., 2023).

3.3.2 Modernization of heavy industries (steel and petrochemicals):

Iran's steel and petrochemical industries are heavily dependent on natural gas. Implementing efficiency improvement projects in three major units (ammonia, urea, and methanol) could not only reduce carbon emissions but also free up gas capacity equivalent to about 1.1 billion cubic meters per year for export. The adoption of European standards in these industries will be a necessary prerequisite for exporting Iranian products to Europe within the framework of the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).

As a conclusion to this section, despite all the strategic capacities for cooperation between Iran and Europe in the energy sector, existing realities show that the path of interaction between the two sides has been blocked due to fundamental legal and political challenges. The reimposition of nuclear-related sanctions in September 2025 under the “snapback mechanism” has placed potential cooperation in a state of uncertainty. Severe financial restrictions resulting from Regulation 2025/1975—including the freezing of the Central Bank's assets and the absolute prohibition of investment in key hydrocarbon projects—have effectively rendered technical and economic cooperation impossible. At the same time, Iran's severe domestic gas imbalance and the erosion of its regional market influence due to repeated disruptions of exports to neighbors such as Turkey and Iraq have removed Iran from Europe's calculations as a reliable supplier. Tehran's strategic alignment with Moscow in energy initiatives and geopolitical tensions in the Caucasus have also created deep conflicts of interest with the European Union's energy security strategy. Therefore, unless the

current diplomatic deadlock is broken and structural reforms are implemented to address domestic imbalances, these vast capacities for cooperation will remain merely missed opportunities, and the prospects for mutually beneficial interaction in the foreseeable future will remain limited.

4. Areas of Confrontation and Iran's Disruptive Agency in Europe's Energy Security

The Islamic Republic of Iran, due to its unique geographical position, control over vital chokepoints, and development of asymmetric military capabilities, possesses significant potential for disruptive agency in the field of energy security. In this framework, disruptive agency refers to the deliberate use of pressure, threat, and disruption tools to influence an adversary's political calculations and increase its strategic costs. This section examines Iran's leverage in this domain and the implications of its potential use for Europe's energy security.

4.1 The Strait of Hormuz

The Strait of Hormuz, as one of the most critical energy arteries in the world, constitutes the hard core of Iran's deterrent power. In 2024, approximately 20 million barrels of crude oil and petroleum products—equivalent to one-fifth of global petroleum liquids consumption—passed through this strait daily, reinforcing its position as an irreplaceable strategic chokepoint. In 2024, nearly 8 percent of the European Union's total LNG imports came directly from Qatar, all of which must transit through the Strait of Hormuz. Countries such as Italy, Belgium, and Poland are among the most dependent on this supply. Any disruption in shipping through the Strait of Hormuz would not only create gas shortages but also intensify competition between European and Asian buyers, significantly raising prices for European end consumers (JallerMakarewicz, 2025).

For Europe, which is now more dependent than ever on Qatari LNG and Persian Gulf oil, any change in the security status of this strait would lead to severe volatility in domestic energy markets. Iran employs a layered strategy for exerting pressure in the Strait of Hormuz, ranging from "limited harassment" to "complete closure." Contrary to common perceptions, closing the Strait of Hormuz does not require a large conventional military operation; rather, the

use of inexpensive tools and asymmetric tactics can make maritime passage unsafe for extended periods (Debuglies, 2025).

From a legal perspective, Iran has consistently distinguished between the “right of innocent passage” and the “right of transit passage” (as stipulated in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea—UNCLOS). Although Iran has signed this convention, it has not fully ratified it. Tehran maintains that it has the right, during times of crisis, to impose restrictions on warships or commercial vessels from “nonfriendly” countries. Any attempt to detain vessels—such as the *Stena Impero* incident in 2019—serves as a diplomatic-military tool in response to international pressure. In 2025, with the activation of the “snapback mechanism” by the European troika, the likelihood of Iran employing this legal-military lever to disrupt energy exports to Europe has increased (International Comparative Legal Guides, 2026).

4.2 Targeting Production and Processing Infrastructure

Another powerful instrument available to Iran is the capacity to physically destabilize energy production and processing facilities in rival countries. The September 2019 attack on Saudi Aramco facilities demonstrated how drone and missile technologies could remove 5.7 million barrels per day of oil production capacity from the market within hours.

For Europe, this implies that even if Iran does not directly target tankers, it could disrupt global supply and trigger price surges in European energy exchanges (such as the Dutch TTF hub) by crippling upstream infrastructure in regional producer states. Any disruption in Persian Gulf production would immediately raise Brent prices and subsequently increase transportation costs and industrial production costs in Europe. Considering that in 2023 Europe spent more than €416 billion on fossil fuel imports, price spikes caused by infrastructure attacks could push this figure to levels that would be extremely burdensome for fragile European economies.

4.3 Allied Groups and the Destabilization of Secondary Chokepoints

Although Europe has significantly reduced its dependence on Russian gas, this shift has created a new reliance on spot markets and distant supply sources. This new dependency has made Europe more vulnerable to maritime disruption.

tions and volatility arising from Iran's disruptive activities in the Middle East compared with the period before the Ukraine war.

The use of allied groups—particularly the Yemeni Ansarallah movement—enables Iran to extend the front line of confrontation with Europe's energy security to the Red Sea and the BabelMandeb Strait. This region carries about 15 percent of global trade and a significant portion of LNG shipments to Europe via the Suez Canal (Schuler, 2024). In 2024, missile and drone attacks by the Houthis reduced tanker traffic through BabelMandeb by more than 50 percent. This disruption not only increased ship insurance costs by up to tenfold but also forced many vessels to permanently reroute around the Cape of Good Hope (Hellenic Shipping News, 2024).

This form of proxy disruptive action allows Iran to challenge Europe's energy supply security without directly engaging in conflict with NATO. For Mediterranean European countries such as Italy and Greece, such disruptions mean delays in receiving critical oil and gas shipments and increased energy inflation.

4.4 Threats to Europe's Digital Energy Infrastructure

Iran's cyber capabilities have evolved over the past decade from simple "hacktivism" to sophisticated destructive cyber operations. In other words, Iranian security institutions have developed the capacity to continuously monitor and target Europe's energy networks through cyber-attacks. Unlike conventional cyber operations that aim primarily at data theft, these attacks focus on penetrating Industrial Control Systems (ICS) and Operational Technology (OT) in power plants, pipelines, and LNG terminals. Penetration of such systems could lead to physical disruptions in energy flows or cause industrial accidents.

Reports in 2025 indicate an increase in targeted Iranian cyber-attacks on Europe's renewable energy sector—particularly in Germany. The objective of these attacks is believed to be slowing the pace of the energy transition and maintaining Europe's dependence on volatile fossil fuel markets (Ribeiro, 2025).

4.5 Energy Convergence Between Iran and Russia

Another lever available to Iran is its strategic coordination with Russia in the energy sector. The signing of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty in January 2025 elevated bilateral cooperation beyond commercial exchanges into what can be described as an "alliance under pressure." Iran and Russia, as

two major holders of oil and gas reserves, attempt—through coordination within frameworks such as OPEC+ and the Gas Exporting Countries Forum—to maintain prices at levels that continue to exert economic pressure on Europe. This coordination undermines European efforts to impose price caps on Russian oil or sanction Iranian petrochemical products. Within this strategic partnership, Iran has shared its decadelong experience in managing a “shadow fleet” with Russia. As a result, Russia has been able to continue exporting oil to Asian markets despite European sanctions and use the resulting revenues to sustain its strategic confrontation with Europe. In return, Russia is modernizing Iran’s nuclear and gas infrastructure, thereby enhancing Iran’s capacity to act in future energy markets (Azizi, 2025).

Overall, Iran’s disruptive agency in Europe’s energy security constitutes a geopolitical reality built on a combination of geography, asymmetric technologies, and strategic alliances. Iran’s instruments—from physically closing the Strait of Hormuz to cyber-attacks on energy distribution networks and the use of regional proxies—form a constellation of threats aimed at increasing the cost of “confrontation with Iran” for European capitals.

Conclusion

The findings of this report indicate that Iran’s position in Europe’s energy security equations cannot be understood simply as that of a “potential partner,” nor merely as a “geopolitical threat.” Iran stands at the intersection of three key variables: vast energy resources, a geostrategic location, and the capability for asymmetric agency. The combination of these three variables makes Iran simultaneously an opportunity and a risk for Europe.

The fundamental reality is that a deep gap exists between Iran’s energy potential and its actual realization. This gap is not the result of resource scarcity but rather of domestic imbalances, aging infrastructure, institutional constraints, and political deadlocks at the international level.

From a positive perspective, in theory Iran could contribute to diversifying Europe’s energy sources, reducing pressure on LNG spot markets, and even supporting the European Union’s green transition goals. Cooperation in areas such as gas swaps, energy efficiency, reduction of flaring, development of re-

newable energy, and green hydrogen production is technically and economically conceivable. However, the return of comprehensive sanctions, the activation of the snapback mechanism, severe domestic gas imbalances, and the erosion of Iran's credibility as a stable supplier have effectively blocked these avenues of cooperation and turned them into unrealized opportunities.

Conversely, in the negative dimension, Iran's role in Europe's energy security is tangible and consequential. Iran's control over the Strait of Hormuz, its ability to destabilize secondary chokepoints such as Bab el Mandeb, its capacity to target energy production and transportation infrastructure, and its significantly enhanced cyber capabilities together form a set of instruments capable of directly increasing Europe's strategic costs. Energy convergence between Iran and Russia further complicates this equation and imposes serious limitations on European efforts to manage markets and exert economic pressure on revisionist actors.

In sum, the future role of Iran in Europe's energy security will depend less on technical or economic variables than on geopolitical and diplomatic developments. As long as the current political deadlock persists and structural reforms in Iran's energy sector are not implemented, Iran will remain more of a strategic risk than a solution for Europe. Under such circumstances, ignoring Iran in Europe's energy security calculations is neither possible nor rational; yet integrating Iran into the architecture of energy security will remain out of reach—at least in the medium term—without fundamental changes in the political and institutional environment. This duality makes Iran one of the enduring paradoxes of Europe's energy security in the coming decade.

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