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FOREIGN INFLUENCE

A DEAL THAT SAVES TEHRAN WILL COST EUROPE

Peace for Washington could become a security nightmare for Europe.

ARDAVAN M. KHOSHNOOD

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Europe's Blind Spot

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The danger for Europe is not only that the Islamic regime in Iran survives its current crisis. The greater danger is that it survives because of a deal with the United States - one that gives the regime time, money, diplomatic space and the illusion of renewed legitimacy, allowing it to do what it has always done: rebuild, adapt and expand its operations abroad.

Europe should be clear about what is at stake. A deal that rescues the regime in Tehran would not produce a normal state. It would preserve a system that has, since 1979, treated Europe as a field for espionage, intimidation, influence operations, criminal outsourcing and, when useful, violence. It would not end the regime's hostility. It would subsidize the next phase of it.

The Islamic regime in Iran is not merely a difficult actor in the Middle East. It is already a European security problem. [Assassinations and terrorism](#) became part of the regime's method immediately after 1979. Iranian dissidents were killed in Paris, Berlin, Geneva and elsewhere. The Mykonos assassinations in Berlin in 1992 were not a criminal aberration; a German court concluded that Iranian state functionaries had ordered the murders. That judgment should have ended Europe's illusions. It did not.



Washington

She lives in the American capital. Her salary comes from the Qatari state. Her broadcasts tell 430 million households that America is a captured...

Instead, Europe learned to compartmentalize. One Iranian diplomat expelled here, one spy case there, one threatened dissident in Sweden, one failed bombing in France, one suspicious mosque in Germany, one cyberattack in Albania, one hostage case in Tehran. Each event was treated as serious, but somehow exceptional. That is exactly how Tehran prefers it. A pattern becomes easier to ignore when every part of it is filed under a different heading: counterterrorism, organized crime, migration control, academic security, cybercrime, religious extremism, antisemitism, hostage diplomacy.

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This is why a US deal is so dangerous. Washington may believe it is buying nuclear restraint, regional calm, or a pause in open confrontation. Europe will be left with the side effects: emboldened embassies, more aggressive intelligence networks, better-funded influence operations, more confident criminal intermediaries, and a regime that can claim it survived the worst pressure the West could impose. For Tehran, survival itself becomes propaganda.

The Assadollah Assadi case showed what this means in practice. Assadi, an Iranian diplomat stationed in Austria, was convicted for his role in a planned bomb attack against an opposition gathering in Paris. The case revealed how diplomatic cover, intelligence work, explosives, money and European travel could be combined in one operation. A study of [Iran's use of diplomats in intelligence and terrorist operations](#) shows that the regime's embassies are not ordinary diplomatic missions. They are protected platforms for surveillance, recruitment and operational planning.



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If a deal reduces pressure on Tehran without dismantling this apparatus, Europe will not get stability. It will get the same apparatus with more room to breathe.

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The regime has also adapted. It knows that sending its own officers or ideological loyalists carries a cost. So it increasingly uses criminal intermediaries. A recent article on [Iran's use of criminal intermediaries](#) describes this as outsourced

For Europe, this is particularly corrosive. A shooting near an embassy can be treated as gang violence. An attack on a dissident can be treated as a local feud. But behind the criminal hand there may be a state.

Sweden has already seen what this looks like. The Swedish Security Service has warned that the Islamic regime in Iran uses criminal networks in Sweden to carry out violent acts against people and groups it regards as threats, including Iranian dissidents, Israeli interests and Jewish targets. The Scandinavian pattern is now too visible to dismiss: a study of [Iranian intelligence operations in Sweden](#) examined espionage, cyber operations, threats against dissidents, plots against Jews, attacks connected to Israeli interests, and the use of mosques and academic environments.

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[In the companion study on Denmark and Norway](#), the same structure appears again: surveillance, intimidation, cyber intrusion, illicit procurement and attempted violence. The [attempted murder of Arvin Khoshnood](#) in Malmö makes the danger concrete. Several youths were later convicted in court in connection with the case, and in a [radio interview](#) the head of the Swedish Security Service used it as an example of how the Islamic regime in Iran uses criminal networks in Sweden for targeted assassinations.

European governments to ignore, because the agreement itself would create a political incentive to pretend that Tehran is becoming manageable.

That is the mistake Europe has made before. It has confused reduced visibility with reduced threat. The Islamic regime in Iran often lowers one form of activity when the diplomatic cost becomes too high, then shifts to another. Assassinations become espionage. Espionage becomes cyber intrusion. Embassy work moves through mosques, cultural centers, students, academics, informal lobbies or criminal networks. The purpose remains the same: protect the regime, silence opponents, shape Western policy, and make Europe pay a price for confronting Tehran.

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The Next Phase

The current crisis makes this more urgent. After the 12-day war and the 39-day war, the regime is not the same regime it was before. It has learned that missiles alone do not create deterrence. It has seen that hard power can fail, that its air defenses can be penetrated, that its commanders can be exposed, and that regional escalation can threaten the regime itself.

and Israel's war against terrorism showed Tehran that Western societies can be pressured from within. Not conquered, but pressured; not through tanks, but through media, slogans, mosques, universities, activists, intimidation and selective outrage.

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A surviving regime will therefore not become quieter. It will become more careful. It will combine missiles with influence, criminal networks with ideology, embassies with proxies, and energy threats with diplomatic bargaining. That is why survival through a US deal is not a pause in danger. It is the beginning of a more sophisticated phase.

The Strait Weapon

The Strait of Hormuz is another reason Europe should worry. Tehran has understood that Hormuz remains one of the free world's exposed nerves. The EU has already had to expand its sanctions framework to target those involved in Iran's actions threatening freedom of navigation in the Middle East, [including the Strait of Hormuz](#). Europe may speak of energy transition and strategic autonomy. Yet a serious disruption in Hormuz would still affect shipping, insurance, energy prices, inflation and political stability. The regime knows this. It does not need to close the Strait permanently. It only needs to convince markets that it might.

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A US deal that leaves Tehran with this leverage intact gives the regime a weapon to use again. Every future crisis becomes another opportunity to threaten global trade and extract concessions. Europe would again be forced to manage the economic fallout while Washington claims it has contained the problem.

The Bill Comes Due

The third danger is Russia and China. Iran without allies is vulnerable. A regime saved by a deal will not become Western-facing. It will use the deal to survive while moving even closer to Moscow and Beijing. This was visible before the current crisis. [Tehran sees Moscow](#) as one of its closest partners. The subsequent [Russia-Iran intelligence pact](#) and the [Iran-China deal](#) showed where this was heading: intelligence cooperation, military cooperation, sanctions evasion, surveillance technology and shared hostility to the Western order.

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For Europe, this links Iran directly to Ukraine. The EU itself states that Iran's military support for Russia's war against Ukraine is unacceptable and has sanctioned Iran over that support; it has also designated the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a [terrorist organisation under the EU counter-terrorism sanctions regime](#). Iranian weapons used by Russia are not a distant problem. They are part of the same security picture as Iranian intelligence activity in Scandinavia and Iranian threats against dissidents in Europe. Tehran helps Moscow bleed Ukraine; Moscow helps Tehran survive isolation. China gives the regime economic and technological depth. Together they create an authoritarian supply line against Europe.

This is why a US deal that saves the Islamic regime in Iran would be dangerous far beyond Iran. It would relieve pressure on a regime that has not abandoned its methods, only adjusted them. It would strengthen a state that has learned from war, not been moderated by it. It would give Tehran time to rebuild its missile program, deepen its work with Russia and China, reorganize its intelligence failures, expand its influence operations, and use Europe's openness against Europe itself.

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The conclusion is uncomfortable but necessary. The Islamic regime in Iran is not a difficult partner waiting to be normalized. It is a hostile state actor using European freedoms, markets, institutions and legal limits against Europe itself. A deal that preserves it will not buy peace. It will buy the regime time.

Europe has already paid enough for the existence of the Islamic regime in Iran. It should not support, bless or quietly accept any agreement that keeps the regime alive while leaving its machinery intact. The first question European leaders should ask is not whether a US deal reduces tension this month. It is what that deal allows Tehran to do next year, in Stockholm, Berlin, Paris, Copenhagen, Oslo, Vienna, Kyiv and the Strait of Hormuz.

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ARDAVAN M. KHOSHNOOD

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Associate Professor | Intelligence & CounterIntelligence

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