Comments on US tariff threat on Iran & trade partners in The National, 9 Feb 2026

Dr. Nasser Saidi's comments on the recent US tariff threat on Iran & its key trade partners appeared in an article in The National titled "Will the US tariff threat have a major impact on Iran's key trading partners?" published on 9th February 2026.

The comments are posted below.

"While the US tariff threat introduces uncertainty, Iran's major diversified export partners (China, UAE, Turkey) are likely more well-positioned to absorb the shock by switching suppliers," said Nasser Saidi, president of Nasser Saidi and Associates and former economy minister of Lebanon.

"The pain will be felt primarily by Iran (revenue loss, isolation, inflationary impact) and Iraq (energy security crisis)," Mr Saidi, who also served as the vice-governor of the Central Bank of Lebanon, told The National.

"Should additional tariffs be imposed, it would be relatively simple for China to source it from other trade partners, including from the GCC (given current production levels). The primary risk here is geopolitical: any such move could reignite the US-China trade war," Mr Saidi said.

For countries like the UAE, Iran is a primary supplier of fresh fruits, vegetables, and livestock due to proximity – short shipping times allow for fresh produce, Mr Saidi said.

"However, if the UAE is forced to halt Iranian food imports to avoid US tariffs, it can switch to alternative suppliers (likely Pakistan, India or Europe). While this involves a

logistical shift, the availability of alternate suppliers suggests that inflationary pressure on food would be contained."

If Iran's top trading partners substantially cut trade to protect their US market access, Tehran will shift to land-based trade and through the Caspian – which is "more difficult for the US to monitor and enforce trade restrictions", Mr Saidi said.

But it is possible that informal trade will increase with small vessels moving food and consumer goods off the books and crossings by land. "Iran could end up offering even steeper discounts on its oil and commodities to keep partners hooked on – leading to loss of revenue. Plus, the decline in Iran's imports would lead to goods shortages, an uptick in inflation, alongside a fall in rial and raising poverty rates," he added.

Meanwhile, Iraq is heavily dependent on Iran not just for food, but also for electricity and gas.

"If Iraq is forced to cut these ties to avoid US tariffs, the result wouldn't just be food inflation: it would be energy inflation and potential blackouts, which drives up the cost of everything locally," Mr Saidi said.

A lot of cross-border Iran-Iraq trade also goes unreported, making it more difficult to monitor, he added.