

MONTHLY REPORT



IRAN CASE FILE

MAY 2018

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May 2018

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report tracks the most important developments in Iran during May 2018. It presents a detailed description on three key aspects of the Iran case-file: Internal, Arab, and international affairs.

Internal Affairs

This section of the report was divided into five parts:

- » The ideological issue: in this part the report addressed some clerics' fears about the growing hostility against them because of the harsh socio-economic conditions, given that Iran has been under the control of clerics since the Khomeini revolution. This public position was clarified by the statement of Javadi Amoli one of the greatest traditional jurists in Iran during a meeting with the Minister of Labor, Ali Rabee' when he said "If people rise up, they will throw us all into the sea." This was about the economic problems and the decline in popularity of the clerics in Iran; both masters and disciples.
- » Politics: the report handled the reasons for the continued absenteeism of President Rouhani from the Expediency Council meetings, reflecting disagreement and a struggle for power between key figures of the Iranian regime. The Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei tends to decrease the role of the presidency in favor of institutions that he appoints. The report also discussed the functions of the Expediency Council, the four proposed reasons for Rouhani's undeclared boycott of its meetings, the developments that took place in this Council after death of its former chairman the late Hashemi Rafsanjani, and its future under the leadership of its former Chief of Judiciary, Hashemi Shahroudi, while taking into consideration the differences between the two men in terms of experiences, political tendencies, and positions within the Iranian regime. In addition, the appointment of Shahroudi- Iraqi by birth and upbringing- as Chairman of the Expediency Council raised many questions on the limits of nationalism in Iran, knowing that he is a strong candidate for succeeding the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei.
- » Military: the report discussed Iran's international military cooperation in light of the resumption of US sanctions on Tehran, the UN resolutions that prohibit Iran from carrying out international military cooperation before the signing of the nuclear agreement, the possibility of sanctions after the collapse of the international pact, Iran's current efforts in building strong military relations before the resumption of sanctions, and Iran's military cooperation with Oman, Afghanistan, and Bolivia.
- » Security: the report addressed the protests in Kazeroun in Fars Province Southern Iran resulting from the government's plans to carve up two areas of Kazeroun to establish a new county. The report also handled the influence of Friday Imams in the Iranian provinces and their ability to motivate the public. On the other hand, there was ambiguity about the motive of the Kazeroun's protests by raising the question "Does changing administrative divisions within a country lead to protests, or is it the harsh conditions that drive the Iranian people to rise for any reason, or is there an internal struggle between

parties for power with people being used as an instrument of pressure?" The report also discussed the plan of dividing Kazeroun, including motives of protesters as well as supporters of the plan and the position of Kazeroun's representative in the Iranian Parliament, Hussein Rezazadeh towards the charges against him of supporting the plan of dividing Kazeroun.

- » Economics: the report handled the European companies' departure from Iran after the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal in May 2018. It also assessed Iranian plans to attract \$20 billion as foreign direct investment until 2021 to revive the economy, knowing that some of these investments have cautiously returned to the Iranian market for fear of the US resuming sanctions on Tehran. In fact, foreign investments in Iran did not exceed 7.4 billion USDs during the period January 2016- September 2017. Foreign companies left Iran after signing multi-billion USD contracts such as Peugeot, Boeing, banks, shipping, automobile, and insurance companies. This left the Iranian economy vulnerable to a strong shock expected to negatively impact economic growth rates by the end of the Iranian current year in March 2019.

The situation will be even worse for Iran in case of a decline of its oil exports - at an average rate of at least 300,000 barrels per day - and the consequent slowdown of the growth of the oil and non-oil sectors, resulting in high unemployment, foreign exchange shortages, and price increases that would burden the Iranian citizen. On the other hand, the rise of oil world prices may have a counterbalance impact on Iranian revenues, but they will remain limited if the US pressure on its allies- the European countries, Japan, and South Korea- succeeds.

Arab Affairs

This section was divided into four parts:

- » Future of the Iranian role in light of the latest developments in the Syrian crisis: the Syrian crisis has entered a new phase represented by the involvement of regional and international players which negatively impact the Iranian role in this country.

This report analyzed the Israeli military strikes on Iranian positions and targets in Syria and their impact on Iranian expansion, especially on the corridor linking Iran with the Mediterranean Sea. The report also addressed the future of the political process to resolve the Syrian crisis by analyzing Astana's resolutions and the reasons behind their failure in light of the intense international involvement in the Syrian crisis. Finally, this part of the report discussed Russia-Iran disagreement because of Israel-Russia agreement on the removal of Iran from the South of Syria and its impact on Iranian presence in this country and its other roles in Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, and other countries to determine the future and size of Iranian involvement in Syria.

- » Future of the Iranian militia incursion in Iraq in the light of the results of the Iraqi parliamentary elections: the Sadrist-backed coalition, Sa'iroun, won the highest votes in the Iraqi parliamentary elections in May 2018, which delivered a serious blow to Iran in Iraq due to the different priorities of Al-Sadr from those of Iran and victory to the states seeking Iraq's return to its Arab environment.

This report reviewed the number of electoral coalitions which participated in the Iraqi parliamentary elections and their electoral programs and tendencies. In addition, it highlighted the internal and external issues facing the new Iraqi government and the reasons behind the Sa'iroun coalition's victory and superiority over other coalitions, especially Sunni coalitions. The report also discussed the expected form of government in the light of these results and the expected Iranian reaction in case Iraq breaks up with Iran and develops strong relations with its Arab neighbors, mainly, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

- » Future of the Iranian-backed Lebanese Hezbollah in the light of the victory of the two Shiite parties, Hezbollah and the Amal movement, in the Lebanese legislative elections held in May 2018: Hezbollah and the Amal Movement won more than half of the seats in the Lebanese parliament- 128 seats.

This report handled the impact of these results on Lebanese internal and foreign affairs in light of Hezbollah's weapon issue and its foreign activities, especially in Syria, and their impact on the Hariri government and its activities, internally and externally. The report also handled the new US sanctions and their impact on the role of Hezbollah in the next period, knowing that these sanctions will be comprehensive and will include both political and military factions of the party. This means that Hezbollah's ministers and MPs will not gain legitimacy and confidence within the new Lebanese formula, which will impact Iran and limit its activities and influence.

- » Finally, the report discussed Iranian activities in the Maghreb states after Morocco's announcement to cut diplomatic relations with Tehran by addressing Iran's relations with these countries, monitoring Algeria's reaction to the Moroccan accusations of its complicity with Iran, and handling the role of the Iranian cultural attaché in Algeria and his activities in infuriating the Algerian people who called for his expulsion from their country. The report also lists the Arab countries which maintain diplomatic ties with Iran in a table attached to the report.

International Affairs

- » The report includes two axes, the first discusses Iranian-American relations that followed President Trump's decision to withdraw from the nuclear agreement as President Trump's decision was expected but the most important question here is what about after the withdrawal? Trump's administration is clearly heading to punish Iran, in the first place, the restoration of the past sanctions programs that include oil exports, which will have a profound impact on Iran. The US administration will also be heading for greater sanctions. This policy will ultimately push Iran to the negotiating table in accordance with US conditions set by Trump, as demonstrated by the terms set by the US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo for renegotiations with Iran. But the other question that arises here is what are the American alternatives for those policies if Iran does not respond to its pressures?

Iran, on the other hand, is moving on more than one track, such as a diplomatic one, to keep the agreement without the United States, or even to try to eviscerate the operative part of the resolution by continuing its economic relations with the West and the world. This is consistent with the position of the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to stay in the agreement, as Iran pursues another track parallel with the first one, to use threats and escalation to exert pressure on various parties. Among the available pressures, Iran is threatening to re-enrich uranium at high rates. Unlikely but still possible scenario, Iran would accept the American conditions.

- » The second axis deals with the implications of the US withdrawal from the nuclear agreement on Iran's international relations, and it also indicates the interactions of Iran's relationship with the signatories to the nuclear agreement (Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China) after the American withdrawal. Furthermore, it compares between the Russian and European relations with Iran after the American withdrawal, in the light of Iranian pressure exerted on Europe and its total surrender to Russia's will. Meanwhile, China is poised to capture the share of the European investment in the Iranian market. Finally, this axis assesses the extent of the US's ability to implement a ban on Iranian oil exports to target the Iranian economy with a painful blow.



INTERNAL AFFAIRS

THE IDEOLOGICAL FILE

There were several events on the Iranian religious, seminary and cultural arena. The most important of these events were the remarks of the clerics regarding corruption, and the reaction of the people towards the clerics as well as society abandoning religious sciences students because of their politicization and the political activities of clerics. These matters will be discussed in the following points:





First: clerics say if the people rise they will throw us into the sea

Jawadi Amali, one of the most prominent clerics in Iran, said in a meeting with the minister of labor Ali Rabei that many have escaped or are preparing to escape. But we have no place to escape. Amali explained by referring to the economic problems in Iran telling the Iranian official that if the people rise, everyone will be thrown into the sea. He noted that there are several issues that cannot be tolerated such as the dual nationality of officials and the siphoning of money by some officials. He added if the people rise due to these issues, the people will turn against the entire regime. It will be forced to step aside. The cleric asserted that the people will throw everyone, even the clerics, into the sea. According to him, the corruption of some officials is unbearable.

The importance of Amali's remarks lies in the fact that he is one of the influential clerics close to Khamenei. He was one of the influential figures at the time of the revolution. And he is a senior figure within the regime.⁽¹⁾

Amali is not alone

Amali was not the only one among those who began to feel the danger of the demonstrations and protests that targeted the house of the Supreme Leader and the religious establishment explicitly. Moreover, several other clerics began to warn of slipping into the abyss with a sweeping revolution, sweeping away Khomeini's rule dominating Iran since 1979.

Bayat Zanjani, a fellow cleric said in his meeting with the Assistant Minister of Youth and Sports that part of the recent demonstrations was the result of ignoring the demands of young people and wondered how the government dealt with the concerns of young people and whether they responded appropriately to them. He denied the government responded appropriately to these demands, saying these concerns are still present on the scene and increase as the days pass.⁽²⁾

After Amali's statement, which sparked a vast wave in Iranian circles and in the Shiite world, as well as on social media platforms, his office tried to alleviate the impact of his statement. The Spokesman for Amali, Rasul Jafarian, said this speech was during Amali's meeting with the labor minister. He added the meeting discussed a lot of marginal issues. But media outlets selectively triggered uproar on this issue, taking it out of context and making controversial headlines. Amali spoke for about 40 minutes. During this speech, Amali pointed to economic and administrative issues as well as embezzlement and administrative corrup-

tion.⁽³⁾ This statement by Amali indicates that there is a real crisis that is being experienced by the Iranian religious establishment, fearing that things will get out of control.

Instead of easing prosecution and oppression and working on development projects to end unemployment and control the capital spent on militias in Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere, the regime is increasing the security grip to subdue its people. In the medium term it may pay dividend. But it may eventually turn to throwing clerics into sea, as Amali fears.⁽⁴⁾

Second: Religious sciences' students lose popular support

In a meeting with Sheikh Arafī,⁽⁵⁾ cleric Mousa Shobairi Zanjani expressed regret that the students of religious sciences have become less pious, dedicated and accepted. Zanjani expressed his concern about this decline in their appeal, saying that those scholars are no longer loved by the public. He added this class was loved and respected in the past. Now, someone may be respected on a certain occasion, but this sort of people are no longer loved or respected. In case of disagreements between the students and other brackets, why do people blame the students for the problem, even if partially? The answer is because they are no longer loved. These things are calamitous; however, we should accept them as they are. According to Zanjani, the students of religious sciences are no longer loved because of their political activities." Many of those individuals are not qualified, let alone the behaviors that belittle those students in the eyes of the public such as the students' canvassing for a certain candidate by placards. Some respected people who work in the market refrain from doing such things. So why do those students do this? If scholars want to do such things, they should possess knowledge about the essential rules thereof. Their engagement in such activities is neither in their favor nor the seminary".⁽⁶⁾

This is indicative of the social crisis that the seminary is living through because of the politicization of religious lessons. This politicization led the seminary to lose its social appeal and vast popularity. The question that should be asked here is: "Will the influence of the seminary on the masses fade away as time passes? The answer may be clear here if we realize the concerns of the Iranian regime and the pro-regime clerics within the seminary about what they call the secularization of society and the modernity of the west. Also, the continued alliance between clerics and the regime and their quasi-amalgamation makes the religious establishment subject to criticism by the public. The people see it as an ally of the despotic and corrupt regime. As time goes by, this will tarnish the image of the religious institution and impact it morally and scientifically. Therefore, the Iranian political system has made fundamental changes to the structure of the seminary and made it - in at least a large part of it - a subordinate to the political system and turned it into an institution within the institutions of the state that cannot break the norms of the political system.

Forward-looking vision

Those following up the issues of the seminary notice that there are two questions about which the clerics are concerned: first: they lost their stature, morally and materialistically among considerable portions of the people. This pushed the regime to finance the religious establishment and shrines, paying tens of millions of dollars to them to fill the financial gap because such groups are no longer sending money to the religious establishment. This loss of stature and respect came due to the engagement of clerics in political activities. They also engaged in legalized corruption, showing deadly silence towards lobbies and corrupt figures. Second, the clerics were extremely concerned about the secularization of society and its modernization, simulating the western culture. The second issue is built on the first. The modernization that clerics fear is harmful to them for several factors, especially the financial one. They fear the public would refrain from giving money to clerics. Secularists do not believe in the religious obligations relating to paying money to clerics, their spiritual or political authority, their grip on the aspects related to the worldly or religious issues. They also fear losing their clout and authority since none of them is ready to relinquish power in favor of their rival clerics, let alone secularists or democrats. They believe in the heavenly ascendancy when it comes to governance. They also stick to the aspects related to

appointing rulers, not electing them. Thus, we can understand their positions in this regard. They are totally convinced they speak in the name of God and are guardians of religion and *Sharia*.

Therefore, the question of the future remains very problematic, and opens the door to scenarios that cannot be predicted, especially after the death of Khamenei in parallel with the end of the first generation of the founding fathers this state after the 1979 revolution. The religious establishment wants to maintain its religious and political influence, and fears that it will back down, or rather fears those in power now would return to pre-1979 without executive positions or political clout. At the same time, they do not want their powers to be curtailed or to give up something to the people. They want an upper hand in terms of security issues to continue repressing the people in fear of the uprising which Amali had warned of. It can be said that the biggest dilemma is that the situation cannot be reversed. Any backing down means that the corrupt will be tried by the people or the looming revolt in case it breaks out. At the same time, sticking to those reckless policies at the internal and external levels will inevitably lead to revolutionary movements that will destroy everything.

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The Political File

Rouhani's continued absence from the meetings of the Expediency Discernment Council:⁽⁷⁾ indications and reasons

Since its establishment, many discussions have been raised about the importance and necessity of this institution and its position within the Iranian regime. The positions varied. Some defended the institution and its role stipulated in the constitution. Critics played down its role in the presence of the Guardian Council which is tasked with overseeing the role of the parliament and approving all laws drafted by it before endorsement. In many of the statements made by the former head of the Expediency Discernment Council the late Hashemi Rafsanjani after taking office, he showed that he hoped to limit Khamenei's authority by further complying with the Council's collective advisory opinion.⁽⁸⁾

The Council was at loggerheads with several presidents such as former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. In February 2010, he wrote a letter addressed to the members of parliament. He accused the Expediency Discernment Council of violating the Iranian constitution through undermining the bodies running the country. He also blasted the heads of the



judicial and legislative bodies due to their support of the Council's decisions. The Council responded, saying it had been established on the directives of the founder of the regime Khomeini. Its role was referred to in Article 112 of the constitution. It stipulates that the aim of the Council is to determine the interests of the regime in the laws approved by the Iranian parliament, which the Guardian Council deems to be running counter to the Sharia and the constitution.⁽⁹⁾

Since the death of Hashemi Rafsanjani, the former head of the Expediency Discernment Council, on 8 January 2017, this complex has undergone a series of developments that have affected its performance and schedule of meetings. These developments are as follows:

- 1- Deterioration of its new chief who travelled to Germany for treatment.
- 2- The absence of the three branches of power (President Hassan Rouhani, Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani and his brother Sadeq Larijani who is the Head of the judiciary) from meetings of the Expediency Discernment Council.
- 3- The lack of regular meetings and the absence of an agenda for the coming meetings despite the passage of two months of the new Iranian year. The Council held only one meeting. Deciding on key issues on the agenda of the Council was delayed.⁽¹⁰⁾

Rouhani's absence from the Council's meetings

Since Mahmoud Shahroudi took office in August 2017, the Iranian street has been constantly talking about the absence of President Hassan Rouhani from the meetings and discussions of the Expediency Discernment Council.

The absence of the President of the Republic in the meetings of this institution, which plays a major role in serving the policies of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the mediator in resolving differences between the legislatures is unprecedented. Even though he did not attend the meetings of the Council regularly when Rafsanjani was in office,⁽¹¹⁾ his complete absence now raised questions and speculation, which are as follows:

First: Some analysts suggested that Rouhani refrains from attending the meetings of the Council as he wants to head the council as it was the case under Rafsanjani and Khamenei.

These analysts cite remarks made by of the media advisor of Hassan Rouhani, Hesamodin Ashna, last March on his Telegram account. He said that presidents of the republic have the right to chair the Expediency Discernment Council. He said that Khamenei, the Supreme Leader, headed the Council when he was president of the republic in 1988.

After the death of Khomeini, the appointment of Khamenei as the Supreme Leader and Hashemi Rafsanjani in the presidency, the latter headed this Council and continued to preside over it until his death in 2017.

Although Mohammad Khatami and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad did not assume the post during their presidency, Ashna believes that the time has come for the Council to remain under the presidency of the republic and believes that the presidents do not accept that this Council be headed by another official.⁽¹²⁾

In response to a question on whether the presidency has discussed the issue of heading the Expediency Discernment Council or not, the Iranian government Spokesman Mohammad Baqir Nobkhat said that the presidency did not address this issue, but there are those who suggested president Rouhani is eligible for the post. He is the head of the Supreme Council for National Security and Supreme Council for the Cultural Revolution. Those adopting this suggestion argue that the president of the republic is the second most powerful figure within the regime, and he should not be dictated to by any figure other than the SupremeLeader.⁽¹³⁾

Second: The former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami expressed his unwillingness to become a member of the Expediency Discernment Council following the end of his two presidential terms. But his predecessor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, remained a member of this Council for a full term after his term as president and he got a second term. And others interpreted it as part of the policy pursued by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in choosing members of revolutionary institutions most loyal to the revolution and removing those who are less loyal.⁽¹⁴⁾

Later in the last Iranian year, Iranians circulated a report indicating that several the members of Expediency Discernment Council, the heads of the three branches of power, Hassan Rouhani, Ali Larijani and Sadiq Larijani, declared they will not partake in the meet-

ings of this Council in case former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad continues to show up in the meetings.⁽¹⁵⁾

But shortly after the spread of this news, the Speaker of the parliament Ali Larijani showed up in a meeting, which led several analysts to consider that the rumors of the heads of the three branches of power's rejecting Ahmadinejad's participation was just speculation. Others ruled out that Rouhani's non-participation was because of his position towards Ahmadinejad.⁽¹⁶⁾ In other words in case Rouhani's absence is because of the participation of Ahmadinejad in the meeting, Ali Larijani's attending the meeting proves that there was no coordination between the heads of the three branches of power.

Third: Some believe that there is a divergence between President Hassan Rouhani and the Expediency Discernment Council on development plans.

In this regard, a member of the Expediency Council, Mahmoud Mohammadi Iraqi, said that the absence of Rouhani began since his objection to the intervention of the Council in the policies related to the Sixth Development Plan, where Rouhani believes that framing these policies is the main function of the government, not any other institution.⁽¹⁷⁾

Fourth: In 2015, the Spokesman of the Presidency Mohammad Baqir Noubkhat said that the reason for the absence of Rouhani from the meetings of the Expediency Discernment Council is the large number of programs and responsibilities of the President. These justifications were criticized by several the regime's leaders at the time as a "worse excuse than guilt". They argued that the president's many actions and programs was merely an excuse to disregard the importance of the Council.⁽¹⁸⁾

Future of the Expediency Discernment Council

The role of the Expediency Discernment Council was associated with the role of its former president, the late Hashemi Rafsanjani, in the Iranian regime. He had special charisma among the regime's officials, despite the differences that erupted between him and the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. He was an experienced politician who fought politics for over half a century. He had a special ability to administer things behind the scenes of Iranian politics. Therefore, his experiences were reflected in the way he managed the Expediency Discernment Council and in influencing the landmark decisions that concern the regime and its future. After his death, the Council lost its relative ability to act as a moderator when it comes to the important decisions taken by the Iranian regime. There is no doubt that the death of Rafsanjani does not mean in any way that this Council will have no impact on the structure of the Iranian regime and the Iranian political arena. But it means that Iran lost the most important channel to influence the orientations and decisions of the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. It is therefore expected that the decisions of the Council concerning the interest of the Iranian regime will be consistent with what Leader Ali Khamenei sees without expressing any opinion and without any dissent.

Security and Defense File

First: Iran and diplomacy of military cooperation considering the re-imposition of US sanctions

As part of its policy of focusing on military cooperation agreements with most of the countries that have full diplomatic relations with Iran, in May 2018, the Iranian military held a series of military meetings and consultations with Oman, Afghanistan and Bolivia. This reflected an Iranian desire to intensify international meetings of military officials in light of the United States withdrawal from the nuclear agreement, and the start of US sanctions on it, and the call of the US Secretary of State to form an international coalition to counter Iranian policies, whether aimed to acquire nuclear weapons or those that threaten peace and security in the Middle East.

Military cooperation and breaking the fetters of sanctions:

The nuclear agreement signed between Iran and the 5+1 group froze many of the UN Security Council's sanctions against Iran and mitigated the consequences of each other under Security Council Resolution 2231 of July 2015. One of the most important international resolutions imposing restrictions on international military cooperation with Iran prior to the signing of the agreement was the Security Council resolution 1774 of 2007, which states in its article VI "Calls upon all States to exercise vigilance and restraint in the supply, sale or transfer directly or indirectly from their territories or by their nationals or using their flag vessels or aircraft of any battle tanks, armored combat vehicles, large-caliber artillery systems, combat aircraft, attack helicopters, warships, missiles or missile systems as defined for the purpose of the United Nations Register on Conventional Arms to Iran, and in the provision to Iran of any technical assistance or training, financial assistance, investment, brokering or other services, and the transfer of financial resources or services, related to the supply, sale, transfer, manufacture or use of such items in order to prevent a destabilizing accumulation of arms."⁽¹⁹⁾

The Security Council resolution 2231, annex B, article 5,⁽²⁰⁾ abolishes the provisions of Security Council resolution 1774 on military cooperation with Iran but makes it subject to the approval of the Security Council for a period of five years post signing the nuclear agreement or a decision by the International Atomic Energy Agency to allow this cooperation to happen. The agreement does not provide for the legal consequences of the exit of one of the signatories of the agreement. Can the agreement be considered null and void if the Iranian party or the second party withdraws or does most of the members of the second party leave? Does canceling the agreement mean the return of all the sanctions that were canceled or frozen or is it necessary to issue new international sanctions?

With the ambiguity of the legal status of the international sanctions imposed on Iran considering the United States withdrawal from the agreement and the possibility of changing the European position and the exit of the three European signatories to the agreement, Iran is moving to break the sanctions before their tightening at all levels, including military cooperation.

» **Iranian-Omani military cooperation:**

Following a joint naval exercise between Iran and Oman in May 2018, the Assistant Chief of Staff of the Omani Armed Forces, Brig. Gen. Hamad bin Rashid Al-Baloushi visited Tehran, heading a delegation of Omani military leaders to meet Brigadier Qadeer Nazmi, Assistant Chief of the General Command of the Iranian Armed Forces for Cooperation. The visit came as part of the annual meeting of the Iranian-Omani Joint Military Friendship Committee.⁽²¹⁾

The Joint Iranian-Omani Military Friendship Committee, which held its 14th annual meeting in early May 2018, coordinates the joint military cooperation frameworks between the two countries, which focuses on conducting joint naval maneuvers in an annual manner coinciding with the date of the committee. The maneuvers' often focus on rescue and logistics training and the organization of traffic operations in the Strait of Hormuz, which is overseen by both countries. The commission also arranges visits of Iranian naval vessels to the ports of Oman, as well as the training and transfer of other expertise.⁽²²⁾

The Iranian-Omani relations have not been affected by the sanctions imposed on Iran in the pre-nuclear agreement at the military level. Military coordination between the two countries is expected to remain regardless of the Security Council resolutions that prohibit military cooperation with Iran except by a special Security Council resolution. It is ruled out the new American position on the nuclear agreement will affect Iranian-Omani cooperation.

» **Iranian-Afghan military cooperation:**

The Afghan Defense Minister Tariq Shah Behrami visited Iran in the second week of May 2018, heading a military delegation to discuss aspects of military cooperation with Iran, especially coordination on the issue of border security between the two countries.⁽²³⁾

There have been repeated Afghan officials' complaints about Iran's cooperation with the Afghan Taliban movement and the implications of such cooperation for the security and stability of Afghanistan. The governor of Farah province, Asif Neng, announced that Iran is training the Taliban in camps on the soil of his province.⁽²⁴⁾ But the officials of the two countries exchanged visits in recent months, the Assistant Afghan Defense Minister Ahmad Tamim Assi visited Iran in March 2018, where he met with officials of the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs of Iran. The visit came prior to the visit of the Afghan Defense Minister.⁽²⁵⁾

These visits reflect an Afghan-Iranian rapprochement, despite the absence of clear military cooperation relations between the two countries. Iran's military maneuvers near the Afghan border were often accompanied by periods of strained relations between the two countries. But the divergence between Pakistan and Afghanistan seems to have positively affected Afghan-Iranian relations,⁽²⁶⁾ especially after the opening of the Iranian port of Chabahar on the Sea of Oman, and the supply of the first shipment of Indian wheat to Afghanistan through this port without passing through Pakistan territory.⁽²⁷⁾



Although Afghan-Iranian relations are currently experiencing economic growth, the military cooperation between them has so far appeared to be limited to security and coordination to combat the drug trade. The announcement of military cooperation comes within the framework of Iranian efforts to establish military cooperation with a country on its territory where there are US and NATO forces.

» Iranian Bolivian military cooperation:

The Commander of the Bolivian armed forces Jamil BordaSousa visited Tehran on 15 May 2018 and met the Iranian Minister of Defense and Supply Amir Hatami.⁽²⁸⁾ The meeting included talks about US policies and its exit from the nuclear agreement. Jameel BordaSousa expressed his desire to deepen military cooperation with Iran in the fields of military manufacturing, building military barracks and military hospitals, and sharing education and training experiences.⁽²⁹⁾

Getting closer to the American border is one of Iran's goals behind consolidating its relations with Latin American countries. Venezuela is the base of the Iranian presence in Latin America. The leftist movement supports the Iranian presence there. The left-wing movement opposes American policies. Iran succeeded in linking the leftist antagonism to the United States and the rapprochement with the Iranian regime, which happened in the era of Ahmadinejad, which corresponded with the presidency of the late Hugo Chavez in Venezuela. Bolivia is not excluded from this rule.⁽³⁰⁾

Bolivian President Evo Morales has been implementing socialist economic policies since taking office in 2006. He has financed several foreign companies operating in Bolivia in the oil, energy and mining sectors. He called the US government Satan⁽³¹⁾ after he expelled the United States Agency for Development (USAID) as it intervened in the internal politics of his country.⁽³²⁾ Bolivia has the stimulants for rapprochement with Iran.

Second: protests in Kezroon and the administrative divisions

The protests in Iran are no longer confined to any particular ethnic group or region. Following the popular protests that took place in various Iranian cities at the end of 2017 and lasted for 3 weeks, popular protests against the regime's plans, programs and policies continued in several cities and regions. Kezroon, is one of the poorest areas in Southern Iran's Fars province, and has a population of 266,000 and 217 people, according to official statistics.⁽³³⁾

The government's plan to separate the two regions of Kezroon to form a new province was the final straw. The protests, which police faced with massive violence, left three people dead, according to the official version, while local sources estimate the death toll to be more than that,⁽³⁴⁾ as well as dozens of wounded and detainees.⁽³⁵⁾ The Deputy Governor of Fars also announced that the protesters set fire to a bank and inflicted heavy losses on police cars.⁽³⁶⁾



Administrative division in Iran

After the victory of the Iranian revolution in 1979, the positions of Iranian officials diverged over how to divide the Iranian regions into administrative units. Some suggested partitioning the country into provinces, while others proposed dividing it into states. A third proposal was to divide the country into provinces. Finally, they agreed to divide the country into provinces. During the past two decades, the development of new governorates continued until they reached 31 governorates. These provinces are in turn divided into smaller administrative units, the provinces and districts, which are also divided into smaller administrative units, the rural areas, which are made up of several villages.

The issue of administrative divisions in Iran and the plans to separate areas of the provinces and annex them to other areas, or the transfer of some small areas to provinces and districts, has been one of the most controversial topics during the decades-long tenure of the Iranian regime. The crisis of separating the area of Caspian, which was the province of Zanzan and the establishment of a new province named Caspian in June 1997 is a case in point.⁽³⁷⁾

The separation was preceded by a series of demonstrations and acts of violence that led to deaths and injuries. Then the crisis of dividing Khorasan province into three governorates in June 2003, North Khorasan with its capital in Bijnord, South Khorasan, with its capital Burgand and Khorasan Razavi with its capital, Mashhad. Following the announcement of the division of Khorasan province, the people of both the Nishapur and Spzawar districts took to the streets in protest against choosing the cities of Injard and Birejand as capitals of the northern Khorasan and Kharasan provinces. These protests resulted in deaths and injuries.⁽³⁸⁾

Motives behind administrative divisions

The demands to divide the Iranian protests diverge. Some support dividing them into new districts and provinces. Others oppose the idea of increasing the administrative units. Those supporting the administrative divisions believe that adding up new provinces and districts will prompt the government to allocate budgets for developing these areas.

The bodies, which are entitled to perform this role, are the lawmakers. They convey the aspirations of the people who elected them. But the residents of the areas which are deemed to be divided by the regime such as Kezroon believe the lawmaker of the city Hussein Reza Zada is seeking to add new administrative units to achieve his personal interests. The main accusation leveled at him in the parliament is that he seeks to bring more privileges and development projects to the areas where he has massive popular support to get the most votes in elections. He seeks to win in the coming elections.⁽³⁹⁾

These benefit-seeking behaviors are counterproductive when it comes to the development of the Iranian provinces. In other words, despite the changes and administrative divisions that the Iranian provinces have witnessed, no progress was made when it comes to a balanced and sustained development. In this respect, the reformist lawmaker in the district of Sibzwar, Ramadan Ali Sabhani, said the only solution to the problem of the administrative divisions in Iran is to give more powers to the governors of districts and work to develop the cities and areas around these provinces instead of direct government intervention represented in adding new administrative units.⁽⁴⁰⁾

The protests continued in the city of Kezroon even after the government announced it was cancelling the plan for administrative division.⁽⁴¹⁾ As a result of the popular discontent which turned into angry protests where anti-government slogans were raised, the Iranian Interior Minister dismissed the governor of Kezroon of the Shiraz province South of Iran. Darwish Dahqan was appointed in place of him.

The director of the administrative divisions within the Ministry of Interior Said Galali called for preserving the historical and cultural identity of Kezroon as well as working to develop the region in all fields.⁽⁴²⁾

Kezroon's division plan and the justifications of protesters

Protesters say Hassan Reza Zada, the area's representative in the Iranian parliament, has been following up the idea of dividing the area administratively for two years until he got the green light by the body on administrative divisions. According to this plan, the areas of Qaimia and Kohamra Nodan, one of them is Reza Zada's hometown, will be separated from Kezroon to be a separate district named Kuheshnar.

The protesters said, as they justified their position opposing the division, that the identity of Kezroon is represented in the religious shrines and a host of villages named Shapor villages as well as the jungle of Bram Plains located in the area falling within the administrative division plan. On the other side, residents of the areas where divisions are proposed suffer from being under-privileged. They also complain of repeated road accidents. They call for developing these areas.⁽⁴³⁾

Hussein Reda Zada has denied these accusations. He also paid no heed to the justifications of the protesters. He also shifted the blame on the Friday prayer leader who opposed the division plan in Kezroon. He also accused foreign parties that he did not name of stirring up the public. He also claimed that he possesses documents that prove officials came from Tehran to Kezroon to inflame the protests.⁽⁴⁴⁾

He also said that the Friday prayer leader and other local officials are the main perpetrators behind the protests. He accused them of giving incorrect information on the project of allocating a new administrative unit. He also rejected the accusations leveled at him on this project. He yet noted the project was proposed by the governor of Fars. The official went on to say that this idea was floated 25 years ago and the former Kezroon lawmakers promised to implement the project, but the Friday prayer leader is the one who opposes it.⁽⁴⁵⁾

The Economic File

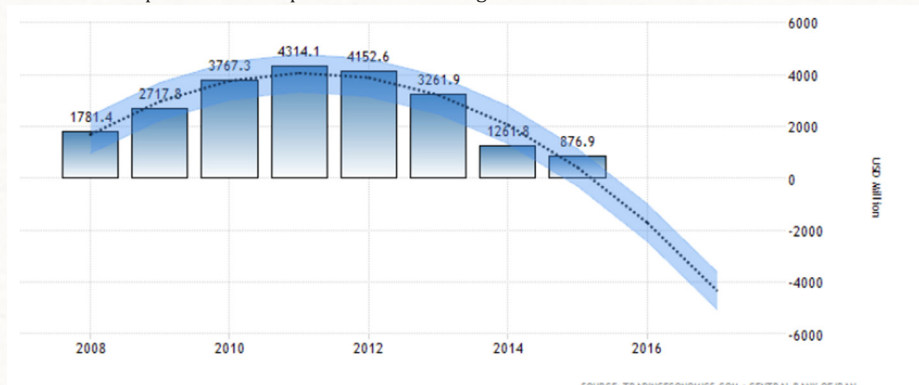
Realities of foreign investments after resuming US sanctions

The oil exports and the ceasing of capital flight were two prime targets for the Iranian officials when they agreed to ink the nuclear deal with the P 5 + 1. After the deal went into force in earlier 2016, the Iranian oil exports doubled, pushing economic growth rates to hit 12 percent by the end of the year. Foreign investments conservatively started to bounce back as investors feared shifts in the position of the US and international community towards the Iranian administration. Investors were right to have concerns since the US unilaterally imposed sanctions on Iran on May 8th, 2018, less than two years and a half from inking the nuclear deal. Several global firms responded to the decision, ceasing their activities and withdrawing from the Iranian market. The Iranian economy was widely shaken by this move. This will impact growth rates, production, the demand for labor, wage rates and the living standard of the people.⁽⁴⁶⁾

Realities of foreign investment in Iran after lifting sanctions in 2016

With the aim of boosting the Iranian economy and making economic gains, the Iranian government planned to attract \$ 20 billion in investment per year as Foreign Direct Investment (FDE) during the period from 2017 to 2021 according to the sixth economic development plan. But at the beginning of 2016 to September 2017, the actual investments barely neared \$ 7.4 billion in the sectors of petrol, gas, petrochemicals, renewable energy and automotive industry.⁽⁴⁷⁾ The current graph indicates the development of FDI in Iran from 2008 to 2015, where it posted \$ 4.3 billion. Then it started to go down amid an international siege in 2012, hitting its lowest point in 2015, where it posted \$ 877 million.

Graph 1: the development of direct foreign investment in Iran from 2008 to 2015.



France and Germany came at the top of the list in terms of pumping foreign investment in Iran following inking the nuclear deal. Their firms entered the Iranian market such as the energy giant Total to develop Gas Fars, which is the biggest gas field in the world. Yet, car manufacturers such as Biju and Stroin of France, and Volkswagen of Germany entered the market. Also, long-term investment contracts were been signed. But some of them were not deemed to be implemented.

» **Major firms exit market**

After the US decision to pull out of the nuclear deal and resume sanctions on the Iranian regime, the US Treasury Department gave the European firms a grace period from three to six months to exit the Iranian market.⁽⁴⁸⁾ They will be fined in case they delay. Therefore, a big number of global firms decided to quit business with Iran, especially the European and American firms even before the six-month grace expires.

Besides fearing the fine, the major firms decided to cede their stake in the Iranian market in return for protecting their bigger stake in the US market, which is considered the biggest market for several firms such as Germany’s Volkswagen, where the US market is the second-biggest for it in terms of sales.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Total of France declared, half of its stocks are held by US nationals, said it will seek an exemption from US sanctions and if not it will exit the market. It signed \$ 4.8 billion with the Iranian government to develop Pars gas field.

The US giant General Electric, and Boeing decided to cease business with Iran. Boeing signed a \$ 16.6 billion for selling eighty passenger jets to Iran. The list of the firms that ceased business in Iran is long. The firms quitting the market increase day after day. Until the end of May, the list included banks, financial services’ firms, insurers, and maritime transporters as it is indicated in the following table:

Table 1: examples of global firms that exited the Iranian market

Examples of global firms quitted business in Iran	
General Electric	Multiple industries
US’s Boeing	Planes
Total of France	Energy
Volkswagen of Germany	Motor industry
MSC of Netherlands	Maritime transportation
Torm of Denmark	Maritime transportation
Elians of Europe	Securing containers
Eni of Italy	Energy
Poland’s PGING	Energy
Austria’s Ober bank	Financial services
Germany’s DZ bank	Financial services
Firms that will continue working in Iran	
Beaugeaut of France	Motor industry
Sokhoi of Russia	Passenger jets
Chinese national petrol firm	Energy

» Firms continuing to work in Iran

On the flip side, there are several European firms that have commercial interests in the Iranian market. So, they decided to stay while reassessing the feasibility of its business. They are waiting for assurances from their governments to protect them from any future sanctions, especially the French firms such as PSA Peugeot Citroën, which called on the EU to adopt a unified official position towards Iran while announcing it will commit to it at any rate.⁽⁵⁰⁾

Also, non-European firms declared they are staying in the Iranian market and will continue to cooperate with Iran, especially from India, China and Russia such as Sokhoi of Russia which is a manufacturer of civil jets. It is likely that the Chinese firms are the biggest winners after the return of US sanctions. The Chinese national petroleum firm will take Total's place in the Iranian market, especially in the deal to develop Pars field after its stake in the deal was below 30 percent while Total's share was 50.1 percent.⁽⁵¹⁾

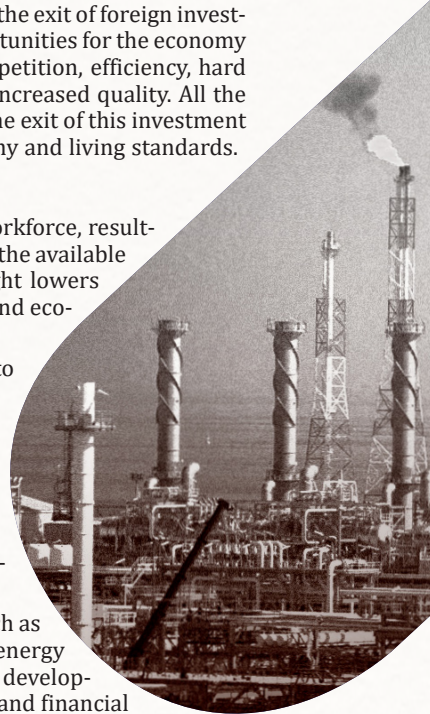
» Consequences of capital flight from Iran

This is the most important aspect of the issue. It is the impact of the exit of foreign investment from the Iranian economy. It focuses mainly on the lost opportunities for the economy in terms of the transfer of capital, expertise and technology, competition, efficiency, hard currency and new products contributing to lowering prices and increased quality. All the foregoing is provided by foreign investment to the host country. The exit of this investment means lost opportunities and high costs at the level of the economy and living standards. They can be summed up in the following points:

- 1- Decline of economic growth, capital, wages and demand for workforce, resulting in high unemployment because of the relationship between the available capital and between economic growth and wages. Capital flight lowers demand for workforce, leading wages to go down. Production and economic growth rate declines as well.⁽⁵²⁾
- 2- Giving a bigger room for monopoly in some industry, leading to a higher price and lower quality due to the absence of competition and the increase in financial burdens on the Iranian citizen.
- 3- Pressuring the balance of payment, leading to the shortage of hard currency due to the decline in foreign currency provided by foreign investment. Production was inside Iran instead of importing products from abroad. High value products manufactured inside Iran were exported.
- 4- The negative impact on local sectors of the Iranian economy such as oil, gas and banking. The departure of insurers, oil tankers and energy firms impede programs of producing and exporting oil and the development of Iranian gas fields.⁽⁵³⁾ Ceasing the transactions of banks and financial firms with Iran will impede trade between Iran and the entire world, depriving society of consumer items and services and raising costs. Any world bank deals in US dollar or who has an offshoot in the US will be liable for a fine by the US.⁽⁵⁴⁾ In case it conducts transactions with Iranian firms, it will be hit by the many US sanctions.

» Future of business in Iran considering the lack of certainty

There is no doubt that the inflow of foreign investment is a key factor for boosting and developing emerging economies. Historical experiences prove that there is a relationship between security and stability and the inflow of investment, even if it includes some stimulants to further attract investment such as tax and exporting incentives.



Therefore, considering the absence of certainty and the return of US sanctions as well as the crises created by the Iranian administration with the outside world and neighbors, capitals and global firms will not find what attracts them to the Iranian market. Moreover, there are fears of an increase in the flight of domestic capital. Thus, reversing this situation rests with the Iranian administration in the first place.

Interaction of events

- » Cleric Alamelhudda says the problem with clerics lies in the rise of reactionary movement within their ranks.
- » The Shiite institution in Iran spends millions of dollars from the budget without being called to account
- » Fellow cleric Mohammed Olwi Gergani calls for sparing the blood of Sunnis
- » Madrasi Association of the Qom seminary decried Trump's decision on the nuclear deal and called for protecting the 1979 revolution and its Islamic values.
- » The supreme council of Madrasi Association of the Qom seminary announced that some people want the seminary to get back to the pre-revolution era under the pretense of preventing government meddling.
- » Iran condemns an attack on a Shiite mosque in South Africa
- » A member of Iranian parliament calls for not using Trump's withdrawal from the nuclear deal to settle scores with Rouhani.
- » The son of Mahdi Karrubi says the Supreme National Security Council works to lift the house arrest placed on his father along with Hussein Mossawi and Zahra Rahnud. He gave no details on the date of their release.
- » Rouhani says his government did not back the decision to block Telegram
- » The Protests at Merker University accuse the foreign minister of not playing a focal role when it comes to saving the nuclear deal.
- » The gunman was killed, and five others arrested in the city of Iranbshar in Sistan and Bluchestan after clashes with security forces.
- » Army, security forces coordinate to secure the outskirts of Ahwaz
- » Dozens of dervishes are tried in the revolutionary court and criminal court in Tehran
- » Top Sunni cleric Molawi Abdel-Hamid blasts banning Sunni clerics from travelling to the areas of the Sunnis
- » The Iranian Energy Minister Reda Ardekanian declared that 120 firms will continue doing business in Iran and Siemens is committed to its agreements with Iran.
- » Italian steel firm suspends business as it is not able to secure 1.5 billion euros to cover Iranian orders. Banks refused to finance these transactions after US withdrew from the nuclear pact.
- » The US Treasury Department listed the head of the Iranian central bank Waliullah Seif, along with three other officials, for sanctions over paying millions of dollars to bolster the IRGC activities and the Quds Force beyond Iran's borders.
- » China and its refineries expressed hope that supplies of oil from Iran would continue as the US pulled out of the nuclear deal. But they refused to offer guarantees requested by the national Iranian oil firm.

Endnotes

(1) Amali is among the clerics who supports the absolute Vilayat-e-Faqih. He favors Vilayat-e Faqih. But he is not supportive of its electoral aspects. He once said Bayah, the method in Islam to choose the ruler, in the Shiite culture is a sign of truth, but it is not a reason for it. The leadership of the jurist, who meets the requirements, is a reason, but not a sign. For Amali, the guardian jurist is the representative of the infallible imam. But he is not a representative for the entire nation. And the nation is not the source of his legitimacy See: Dr. Ali Fayyad: Theories of Power in Contemporary Shi'i Political Thought, No. 3 / Center of Civilization for the Development of Islamic Thought, 2010, from pp. 253 on.

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(7) Established in 1988 by the founder of the Iranian regime, Ruhollah Khomeini, the expediency discernment system was established in 1988 to carry out several tasks: Solving the problems and disputes between the parliament and the Guardian Council over the enactment of laws and regulations. The supreme leader of the Iranian Revolution appoints its permanent and temporary members, except for the heads of the three executive (legislative, judicial and judicial) authorities, including the jurists of the Guardians Council, the Chief of Staff and the Secretary General of the Iranian National Security Council, who acquire their membership automatically. This body shall be joined by non-permanent members such as ministers if the issues raised in the meetings fall within the scope of their competence. The term of this body shall be five years.

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ARAB AFFAIRS

First: The Iranian role in light of Syria's entry onto the regional and international stage

» Israeli-Iranian military escalation:

The escalation between Israel and Iran increased in May 2018 because of growing Israeli concern over Iran's violation of its red lines. Iran expanded its influence in Syria resulting in its being classified as a national security threat by Israel, with it visible in the South-west of Syria from the west of the road linking Damascus and the city of As-Suwayda about 50-70 km from the disengagement line in Golan Heights, according to the Israeli's.⁽¹⁾ Iran seeks to establish a full army in Syria to counterbalance Israel so it can become a constant threat for Israel.⁽²⁾ In less than a month, Tel Aviv carried out two shelling operations against what it described as Iranian and Syrian targets and bases. These strikes were confronted by limited Iranian air strikes against Israeli military positions inside the occupied Golan Heights.



The first Israeli military strike took place in May 2018, less than an hour after US President Donald Trump announced the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran on 8 May 2018 and the restoration of economic sanctions. Israel bombed Iranian and Syrian positions in Al-Kiswah situated in the Damascus countryside in response to the abnormal movement of Iranian forces in Syria that were preparing to fire rockets into Israel. The Israeli missile attacks killed 15 fighters, including eight fighters of the IRGC or the pro-Iranian Shiite militias.⁽³⁾

The second Israeli airstrike was in May 10 2018. The biggest Israeli attack against Iranian positions in Syria since the outbreak of the crisis 2011. This was in response to the limited air strikes by Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps from Syria against Israeli targets in the occupied Golan Heights - but the Israeli Iron Dome system intercepted 4 missiles while the other missiles did not reach their targets.⁽⁴⁾ The Israeli army spokesman Col. Jonathan Conriscos said that Israeli air fighters had destroyed most of Iran's infrastructure in Syria by bombing 70 Iranian military targets inside Syria. Washington held Iran responsible for this attack, by considering Israel's right to self-defense.⁽⁵⁾ Israeli's statement announced the destruction of the following Iranian targets:⁽⁶⁾

- » An Iranian camp north of Damascus.
- » The Headquarters of the Logistics Command for the Quds Force.
- » Intelligence systems and sites for the Quds Force.
- » Iranian intelligence sites operated by the Quds Force.
- » A military compound and a logistics complex belonging to the Quds Force in Al-Kiswah.

- » A storage weapons site for the Quds Force at Damascus International Airport.
- » A reconnaissance and military site that launched rocket towards Israel in May 9 along the disengagement zone.

Furthermore, there were other air strikes at the end of April 2018 against Iranian positions and targets in two Syrian governorates Hama and Aleppo, which killed 26 fighters loyal to the Damascus regime, four of them were Syrian and the other Iranian and Hezbollah fighters according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. There has been a lot of discussion by the Syrians over the operation, with them accusing Israel or the US for carrying out the strikes. At the same time, Tishreen, the Syrian state-owned newspaper, stated the rockets were fired from US and British military bases. Several analysts and the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the most likely source of the operation was Israel, which had already claimed its responsibility for about more than 100 raids in Syria during the civilwar.⁽⁷⁾

There are four Israeli red lines in Syria, the first and the second relate to Hezbollah and Iran to prevent them from exploiting the conflict to smuggle rockets inside Lebanon to support the party's military arsenal, to prevent a change in the rules of the game in Syria and to prevent Hezbollah and Iran from establishing an offensive infrastructure near the ceasefire line in Southwest Syria. The third is to target Israeli towns and the fourth is related to the Syrian armed opposition groups attacking the Druze population south-west of the border with Jordan, especially in the village of Hadar near the armistice line.⁽⁸⁾

Tel Aviv is still escalating against Iran and Assad, threatening to eliminate him if he continues to allow the Iranians to act against Israel from Syrian territory. The Minister of Energy Yuval Steinitz said, "If Assad continues to allow the Iranians to operate from his territory, Israel will destroy him and his regime." He added, "Assad cannot sit quietly in his palace and turn Syria into a base to attack Israel, and we will not allow Syria to be a military base for the IRGC" and "What happened in Lebanon and the strengthening of Hezbollah is a model, and if we do not prevent Iran from establishing its presence in Syria, we will get another Hezbollah in Syria."⁽⁹⁾

The Iranians, in turn, threatened to respond to the military attacks and asserted that the Iranian presence in Syria is official at the request of the Syrian government and for the legitimate aim to fight terrorism. The Head of the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, Alaeddin Boroujerdi, said that the Israeli action was a hostile act that calls for an Iranian response at the time right and the Iranian forces are in Syria at their request.⁽¹⁰⁾ The Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bahram Qasimi said, "the presence of Iran in Syria is an invitation from the Syrian government and its objective is to fight terrorism and as long as there is a threat of terrorism and the Syrian government's desire of our presence, we will continue to provide our assistance to this country".

He added, "who should come out of Syria, the one who entered the Syrian territories without the permission of this state's government."⁽¹¹⁾

The experts split into two groups concerning a possible Israeli –Iranian war, the first dismiss the likelihood of war by claiming that the US and its allies do not favor a war as much as they want to drag Iran's and Russia's attention to America's presence at the regional and international levels and to alert regional and international parties to the impact of a new catastrophic war on their security, military and economic conditions, as well as on their domestic considerations, especially Iran's internal affairs, which witnessed intractable economic crises and it will deteriorate further after the American withdrawal from the nuclear agreement. However, a war is not in Russia's interest, the owner of bases and interests in Syria.⁽¹²⁾

The second group puts the odds of a war in light of Israel's hardline tendencies of senior military, security and political leaders towards Iran, such as the Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot, the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman, as well as the lack of negative votes in the Israeli cabinet despite the possible risks involved. The prevailing public opinion in Israel is that Iran, without taking decisive steps, will succeed in a short time to deploy a surface-to-surface missile system, along with a drone and the air defense system in Syria to continue transferring weapons to Hezbollah in Lebanon.

According to the analysis by the Israeli security services, Iran continues to send qualitative weapons systems to Syria, not necessarily to Hezbollah in Lebanon, but to strengthen Iran's military power in Syria as part of Iran's preparation to respond to Israel's attacks.⁽¹³⁾

As long as there is an Iranian effort on expanding the scope of its influence according to its agenda in the region and an unreal Iranian intention to stop its activities in Syria which concerns the Israeli decision-makers, then a direct clash between Israel and Iran is possible in spite of all the considerations which are presented by the first group, in the light of the US withdrawal from the nuclear agreement and its support for Israel's attitude against Iran.⁽¹⁴⁾

» **The failure of the ninth round of political talks to address the crisis:**

With the absence of the US representative, the foreign ministers of the three guarantor countries (Russia, Turkey, Iran), the delegation of two Syrian opposition groups headed by Ahmed Tohma, the Syrian regime headed by Bashar al-Jaafari, the UN Special Representative to Syria Staffan de Mistura, and the delegations of the United Nations and Jordan as observers attended the ninth round of Syrian peace talks that were held in the Kazakhstan capital on 14 and 15 May 2018 to discuss the outcome of the Astana-8 resolutions, which took place in December 2017.

The files discussed at Astana included the detainees' file, the review of the implementation of the cessation of hostilities file, the demining file, and the deployment of the Turkish observation file in Idlib.⁽¹⁵⁾

This round of peace talks was fruitless of any resolution related to the detainees file, as well as transferring the outstanding issues to the next round in Sochi July 2018. However, the final statement did not add any new decision only a repetition of the previous commitments to continue the work for de-escalation zones and to protect them, and to maintain the ceasefire.⁽¹⁶⁾ The items below were included in the final statement of the round:⁽¹⁷⁾

- » The commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Syria and everyone must respect these principles and avoid any step that violates them.
- » The importance of the implementation of the memorandum of understanding dated 4 May 2017 which is based on creating areas to reduce tension in Syria.
- » The importance of the main role played by the areas of tension reduction in maintaining the ceasefire, reducing violence in the field and stabilizing the general situation in Syria.
- » The need to encourage the efforts to assist the Syrians in restoring a normal and peaceful life, as well as the need for rapid, safe and unlimited humanitarian and medical assistance to people in need, as well as creating the necessary conditions for the safe and voluntary return of refugees internally and externally.
- » Fighting terrorism in Syria to destroy ISIS, the Al-Nusra Front and entities depending on Al-Qaeda and ISIS which are identified by the UN Security Council.
- » Welcoming the convening of the second meeting of the Working Group on the freedom of detainees and kidnappers, the handover of bodily remains and the identification of missing persons by representatives of the three guarantor states with the participation of experts from the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross in July 2018 in Ankara.
- » Reaffirming, through the provisions of the Security Council Resolution 2254, on their determination which is based on the joint efforts to advance the political settlement by facilitating the implementation of the recommendations of the Syrian National Dialogue Conference in Sochi.
- » Making the decision of convening the next international summit on Syria in Sochi July 2018.

The round failed as expected before, then how is it possible to engage in a negotiation that requires, at the first place, to respect all the relevant agreements to the crisis, especially the cease-fire agreements and the reduction of escalation on one hand, and long term confi-

dence-building measures on other, which are not available in the Syrian case. However, the guarantor states flout the agreement by carrying out air and ground strikes against some safe and unsafe areas, which triggers the escalation.

Syria has become a battleground for many parties; for example, Russia and Iran target Eastern Ghouta by carrying out air and missile strikes, in addition to shelling the neighborhoods Idlib's countryside, the countryside of Hama and Northern Aleppo with mortars and rocket strikes under the pretext of fighting ISIS. Turkey has consolidated its military presence in Afrin, and United States from its side is striking the Iranian and Syrian sites in Syria, as well as, there is Iranian and Israeli escalation through mutual air strike from their positions of influence to expand and consolidate their extension of influence regardless of any agreement that may impede their interests and influence.

» The escalation of Iranian and Russian difference:

The Russian alliance with the Iranians in Syria does not preclude the differences that exist between the two since it is considered as an alliance of necessity linked to the nature and continuity of the threats, common interests, and benefits for both countries. The alliance of necessity may witness disagreements once the threats and the common interests of the allies disappear when each party of the alliance seeks its own benefit. At this level, each ally looks at the capabilities and weight of the other ally, which are overlooked during the inauguration of alliance. The pace of disagreement may escalate with developments in the field and the shifts in regional and international positions, especially when the differences are brought to the attention of the media, then the alliance may experience a new stage that may lead to breakdown as each ally tries to devour gains and spoils as much as possible.

In this regard, the *Jerusalem Post* reported on May 28, 2018 that Tel Aviv and Moscow had agreed to allow the Syrian army to re-establish control of Southern Syria to the border with Israel, moreover, Iran and Hezbollah are not allowed to participate in this military action, and this was followed by a visit of the Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman to Russia. The newspaper added that the forces of President Bashar al-Assad will be supported to restore the South of the country, in which Israel will participate and allow Assad to regain control of all Syria. This is consistent with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's statement that the only military presence allowed on the border South Syria is the presence of regularSyriangovernmentforces.⁽¹⁸⁾

The disagreement between the Russian-Iranian alliance was already there before the elimination of ISIS specially when the Iranian-backed Shiite militias in Aleppo threatened at the end of 2016 and at the beginning of 2017 to storm the remaining neighborhoods in Aleppo to force Russia and the Syrian military factions that agreed on the truce to evacuate the besieged population and hand over the city. It got worse after the ISIS period because of different files such as, the scope of the spheres of influence of both countries in Syria, the range of the areas of influence of both countries in Syria, the control of the Syrian economic resources (phosphate / oil), the competition for signing of reconstruction contracts, and finally the presence of Shiite militias in Syria after ISIS.

Second: The future of the Iranian role in light of the results of the Iraqi parliamentary elections

The Iraqi parliamentary election in 2018 was held in a different environment and timing than the previous one as Iraq entered a new stage when Iraq's Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi announced the elimination of ISIS and his success in blocking the secession of the Kurdistan region, as well as joining the Iranian backed - Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) officially to the Iraqi army.

The elections were held on May 12, 2018, with the participation of 27 coalitions comprising of 143 parties,⁽¹⁹⁾ as well as the participation of 61 other parties independently as the total number of participating parties reached 204. The majority of the coalitions were

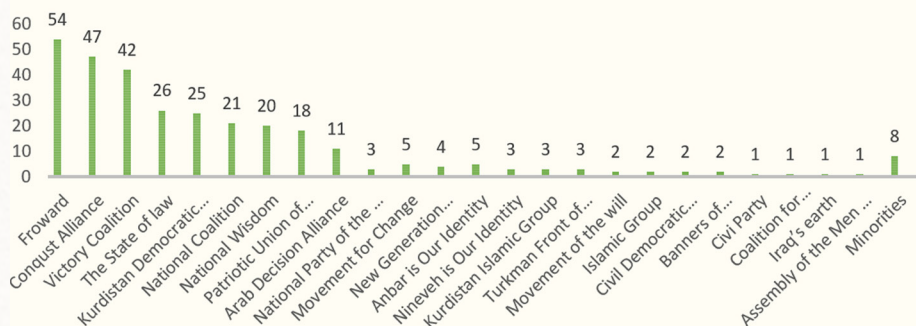
divided into six main coalitions: Al-Nasr led by al-Abadi, the Forward (Saeroun) Alliance by Muqtada al-Sadr led by Hassan al-Akoli, the Conquest (Fatih) Alliance with the participation of the PMF leaders led by the head of the Badr Organization Hadi Al-Amiri,⁽²⁰⁾ the State of Law Coalition led by the former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, the National headed by Ayad Allawi with the participation of several Sunni figures such as Saleh al-Mutlaq and Salim al-Jabouri, the Kurdish coalition that included the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan headed by Kosrat Rasul Ali, the Kurdistan Democratic Party headed by Massoud Barzani and the Kurdistan Communist Party headed by Kamal Shaker.⁽²¹⁾

According to the final results announced by the Independent High Electoral Commission, the Forward ranked first with 54 seats out of 328 seats,⁽²²⁾ it shocked the decision makers in Iran and indicated a significant change in Sadr's positions towards moving away from Iran as his victory will change the Iraqi internal equation and Iraq's regional and international relations, which is of concern to Iran.⁽²³⁾

The Conquest came in second place with 47 seats. Victory won third place with 42 seats, while the State of Law alliance ranked fourth with 26 seats. The Kurdistan Democratic Party ranked fifth. The National Coalition won 21 seats and the Iraqi Decision Coalition won only 15 seats, while the National Wisdom Movement, headed by Ammar al-Hakim, also was ranked late with 20 seats (see Table).

As a result of electoral fraud suspicion in the Sunni cities and provinces liberated from ISIS, where the charges were directed to the PMF for forging the elections in these areas, which are still under their control⁽²⁴⁾. The Iraqi Council of Representatives decided that the relevant parties count manually at least 10% of the ballot boxes in the electoral centers and if a discrepancy of 25% of the results is proven and then the counting will be carried out manually for all governorates, as well as the decision to cancel the elections abroad and the conditional voting in the displaced camps in Anbar, Salah, Nineveh and Diyala⁽²⁵⁾.

The distribution of the coalitions' seats according to the final results



Source : prepared by the Unit of Regional and International Studies ,International Institute of Iranian Studies ,based on the following sites

<http://:cutt.us/PDcuo> ,<http://:cutt.us/SDejk> ,<http://:cutt.us/K6x9g>

The question here is why did the Forward bloc come first and Conquest second while the other coalitions' share declined such as the Victory National and the State of law? The answer here is related to several reasons, and some of them because of the coalitions themselves; for example, the Forward bloc overcame sectarian tendencies, and its program is close to the concerns of the public and the issues of Iraq by giving priority to fighting corruption and the independence of Iraq which is consistent with Iraq's civilization,⁽²⁶⁾ as well as, its demand for opening up Iraq to its Arab surroundings and refusing regional and international guardianship over its decisions. Muqtada al-Sadr has become more than a

representative of a religious current in Iraq, but he stands for a national current. He enjoys external support to stand as an anti-Iranian current in Iraq.⁽²⁷⁾

The Conquest coalition came in the second place due to the role played by the Shiite PMF in eliminating ISIS and its ability to forge the elections in the provinces which have been under its control since their liberation from ISIS.⁽²⁸⁾

The specialists in Iraq's affairs explained the decline of the Victory alliance was because of the public discontent resulting from the joining of the PMF to the army during the al-Abadi period,⁽²⁹⁾ and its program concentrated on issues that do not concern Iraqi citizens with increasing corruption levels and deteriorating economic conditions, moreover, parliamentary accusations against al-Abadi for his failure to fight corruption.⁽³⁰⁾ At the same time, the State of law decline is because of the perception of a large segment that the occupation of the Sunni cities was during the Maliki period. He formed the armed militias and gave priority to the Qom marja; moreover, corruption escalated during his reign. Finally, he separated Iraq from the neighboring Arab countries.⁽³¹⁾

The alliances of the Sunni's ranked low because the majority of Sunnis were displaced from areas that witnessed military battles against ISIS, losing their identity cards during the battle that led them to abstain from participating in the elections,⁽³²⁾ and losing their confidence in the candidates, for example, Ethel Nujaifi, Osama Abdul Aziz al-Nujaifi's brother was the governor of Nineve when ISIS invaded Mosul 2014.⁽³³⁾

These results are very important because they reflect the awareness of the Iraqi citizen and his understanding of his country's long-standing civilization, which explains his support for the Forward bloc that is an anti-sectarian trend and affirms the Arab character of Iraq.

» Formation of the Iraqi government and the future of Iran's regional role

The results of the elections revealed that none of the coalitions won an absolute majority of 165 seats (half +1) to form the new government. Thus, the only way to get the majority is to form a large conglomerate in alliance with several currents and political parties. This was reflected by the statements and tweets of the leaders and supporters of the winning alliances in the elections, especially the tweet of al-Sadr, in which he said " (Forward) with (wisdom) and the (national) to be the (will) of the people's demand, and build (new generation) and witness (change) towards reform and to have Iraqi (Decision), So we raise (banners) of (Victory) and the capital (Baghdad) is (our Identity) and our (Democratic) (Movement) should be towards establishing one family government of technocratic members no partisanship in it."⁽³⁴⁾ Al-Sadr wanted to collect the names of the parties allied with him that were mentioned in brackets. He confirmed on 30 May 2018 his rejection of Iranian intervention in the Iraqi issue.⁽³⁵⁾ The likely scenario is the formation of a government without the Conquest and The State of Law, then we face a new Iraqi equation not in the interest of Iran's role in Iraq.

If this scenario happens, dramatic change will take place in Iraq. Najaf, the Shiite most important authority in Iraq, might be forced to dismantle the PMF and replace it with a national nonsectarian power. This will influence Iraq's foreign policy towards the Arab countries and boost rapprochement with the Gulf States. Al-Sadr's visit to Kuwait on May 29, 2018⁽³⁶⁾ was a profound message that Iraq is keen to return to its Arab realm, frame a balanced foreign policy and bridge the Iraqi-Gulf gap—which resulted from the policies of al-Maliki and Iran's proxies that emerged after the U.S. invasion to Iraq.

These speculations made the Commander of the Quds Force Major General Qasem Soleimani meet with leaders of the Iraqi coalitions to discuss establishing a sectarian Shiite Iraqi government, which would maintain Iran's interest and gains in Iraq and be able to complete the Iranian expansionist project, ensuring that Iraq will not return back to the Arab camp.⁽³⁷⁾

Iraq's election results have offered a golden opportunity for the Arab and Gulf States. They can remove Iraq from Iranian influence through increasing mutual visits, coordinating with the new government on regional and international issues, strengthening economic re-

lations through the reconstruction of the territories liberated from ISIS and supporting the calls for dismantling the PMF. In this context it is worth drawing attention to the fact that a large amount of electricity is provided by Iran to Iraq, so the Arab states should provide Iraq with adequate electricity to make Iraq independent. Iran in this area, which is reflected by Saudi Arabia's effort, as it endorsed on May 30, 2018 to authorize the Minister of Energy and Industry and Mineral Resources to discuss with the Iraqi side the electric power issue and the requirements of Iraq in this field.⁽³⁸⁾

If this scene of forming a different government in terms of orientation and foreign policy against Iran, and stepping away from Iran's agenda - although the Iranian-Iraqi disengagement is not easy - succeeded, then Iran should act in more than one direction:

First: chaos and blowing up the Iraqi arena

It can be accomplished by pushing the militias deployed in Iraq to spread chaos, or through exploiting the liberated areas from ISIS, which are still controlled by its militias, for supporting the emergence of other extremist groups to spread beyond the borders of those liberated areas that would affect Iraq's security, in turn, it would be exploited by Iran to ensure the sustainability of the PMF in Iraq. This is a very serious issue that must be addressed both at the Arab and Gulf level through reconstructing the liberated areas rapidly.

Second: the scenario of assassinations

It could be possible by carrying out assassinations against some officials who reject the Iranian project, especially Iran has a black history of assassinations.

Third: turning Iraq into a major arena of conflict after Syria:

This scenario is like the Syrian case which turned into a battleground for Iran's regional and international parties as a result of Iranian greed and the increasing Iranian influence in Syria by pushing the rest of the other parties which have an interest in Syria to expand their influence and secure their interest. Then it is expected Iran will do the same scenario in Iraq.

Third: Future of Hezbollah between winning the parliamentary elections and U.S. sanctions

» Dimension of Iran's role in Lebanon considering the 2018 parliamentary elections:

In Lebanon, 970 candidates competed in the elections for the 128-seats in parliament on May 6, 2018.⁽³⁹⁾ The 2009 parliament twice extended its term due to Hezbollah's influence in the country that had led to the two-year presidential vacuum.⁽⁴⁰⁾ In addition, the ramifications of the Syrian crisis have affected the Lebanese domestic front as Hezbollah along with Iran-backed militias fought shoulder to shoulder with pro-Assad forces in Syria. Moreover, Hezbollah played an integral role in approving the new Lebanese election law which had been compulsory since 1920.⁽⁴¹⁾ The new election law, issued in 2017, divided Lebanon into 15 electoral districts where candidates were to be elected according to proportional representation (PR) and run-off voting.⁽⁴²⁾ The Iranian President Hassan Rouhani confirmed that his country would keep supporting the Lebanese people and their government to fight terrorist groups and Israel. This statement by Rouhani showed the profound role Iran plays in Lebanon through its proxy Hezbollah.⁽⁴³⁾

Several political parties and movements competed in the 2018 elections: the March 14 Alliance (Future Movement, Lebanese Forces, Lebanese Phalanges Party, National Liberal Party, Progressive Socialist Party.) and the March 8 Alliance (Free Patriotic Movement, Hezbollah, Amal Movement, Marada Movement, Syrian Social Nationalist Party). The two alliances compete to win a clear majority of seats in parliament. The major issues raised by the election campaigns evolved around Hezbollah and its external military activities, economic conditions, and the situation of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. The elections results

are as displayed in **table 1**:

Table 1: Results of Lebanon 2018 Elections					
Coalitions and parties	Leaders	Number of seats	Coalitions and parties	Leaders	Number of seats
Free Patriotic Movement	Gebran Gerge Bassil	20	Future Movement	Saad al-Hariri	21
Hezbollah	Hassan Nasrallah	14	Lebanese Forces	Samir Geagea	15
Amal Movement	Nabih Berri	16	Lebanese Phalanges Party	Samy Gemayel	3
Marada Movement	Tony Frangieh,	3	Azm Movement	Najib Mikati	4
Syrian Social Nationalist Party,	Ali Khalil Kanso	3	Progressive Socialist Party (PSP)	Walid Bey Jumblatt	9

Design by: the Unit of Regional and International Studies, Rasanah IIIS

Data source: *Annahar* Newspaper; <http://cutt.us/KNZV5>, Lebanon Election website, <http://cutt.us/SEHvr>, *Alalam*, <http://cutt.us/ELsPO>, *Sputnik News*, <http://cutt.us/ZRKrs>

Hezbollah and the Amal Movement, dubbed the “Shia duo,” secured 30 seats of the 128-seat parliament, according to the official results of the 2018 elections, whereas they won 25 seats in the 2009 elections. If we include the seats of their allies: the Free Patriotic Movement, the Marada Movement, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party and others it becomes clear that the Shia duo won the majority of 128-seat parliament, i.e., they won more than half the seats in the parliament. On the other hand, the Future Movement captured only 21 seats even though in the 2009 parliament it won 36 seats with a significant difference of 15 seats. Saad al Hariri, the leader of the Future Movement, said that his party lost more than a third of its seats in the 2018 parliament.⁽⁴⁴⁾

However, the Future Movement is still on top of the Sunni coalition by winning the majority number of seats compared with the rest of the Sunni parties. By convention the prime minister must be a Sunni Muslim, Hariri has been named to form the new government. President Michel Aoun and the country’s 128 legislators, 111 named Hariri for the third time to form the new government on May 24, 2018.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Nabih Berri, leader of the Shiite Amal movement, has been re-elected as Speaker of Parliament for the sixth time in a row.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Michel Aoun was elected as the president— as the presidency in Lebanon must be for a Maronite Christian.

The elections results unfold how dramatically Hezbollah has deepened a strong political influence in Lebanon. Hezbollah bounced from capturing only 43 inactive seats in 2009 parliament into winning a majority. Accordingly, Hezbollah dominates the Lebanese domestic front, state institutions, and decision-making process. It imposed its Iran-crafted agenda through parliament. Hezbollah now frames new draft legislation, is granted powers to interrogate, pass motions of no confidence if it faces a conflict of interest with the government, has the lion’s share in key ministries and is the most influential power in deci-

sion-making in the new government.

Further dissecting the new parliament, it is apparent that Hezbollah has an unprecedented opportunity to legitimize its arming and launching with the IRGC military operations in Syria. It can entrench its presence at home and abroad, as well as, the equation of *people, army* and *resistance* will be easily and further deep-rooted in Lebanon. Hassan Nasrallah said “the parliamentary representation for resistance and its allies gives a great guarantee to protect the equation of people, army and resistance that ensures the protection of the country.”⁽⁴⁷⁾ Ali Akbar Velayati, the foreign policy adviser to the Iranian Supreme Leader said “this victory; the Lebanese people voted for the resistance choice is a result of the impact of the Lebanese current policies in maintaining and supporting Syria’s independence against terrorists.”⁽⁴⁸⁾ The previous two remarks have a clear-cut denotation of this equation.

Hariri’s government will be handcuffed tighter than ever. It will not be able to execute its foreign and domestic agendas without taking into consideration Hezbollah and Iran nor it will be able to secure a quorum for taking decisions on any issue or passing laws without coordinating with Hezbollah. As Hezbollah’s arming and military activities are not a priority in the new government, the party will probably spread its influence wider in Syria. The international community may put far more pressure on Iran after the U.S. pull out of the JCPOA, the U.S.-Israel airstrikes against Iranian military sites in Syria, and the rising Russian-Iranian tensions. Definitely, this will further escalate and complicate the Syrian crisis and will probably make the political settlement proposed in Sochi and Astana seem like a pipe dream.

» The U.S. option to counter Hezbollah’s influence in Lebanon and the region

The U.S. sanctions imposed on Iran have not only targeted Iran’s growing influence in the region but also its strategic proxies, especially Hezbollah. The United States deeply realizes the dangers of the growing influence of Hezbollah after the 2018 elections. The U.S. Treasury Department imposed sanctions, on May 18, 2018 on Hezbollah’s political and military wings. The new sanctions are placed on the General Secretary of Hezbollah Hassan Nasrallah, his deputy Naim Qassem, his assistant for political affairs Hussein Khalil, head of Hezbollah’s Political Council Ibrahim Amin al-Sayyed, head of the Sharia Council Mohammed Yazbek, the group’s key financial representative to Tehran Abdollah Safi-Al-Din and Hezbollah’s top financier Mohammad Ibrahim Bazzi. The department blacklisted companies funding the group such as the Belgian energy services, a Gambia-based petroleum company, a Lebanon-based Africa Middle East Investment Holding and the Lebanon-based import-export group Car Escort Services.⁽⁴⁹⁾

The new U.S. sanctions are comprehensive including the military and political wings of Hezbollah as a hedging strategy to delegitimize the group’s parliament members and ministers and to curb the group’s activities at home and abroad. The three sanctions in October 2017 were only placed on the military wing of the group to avoid delegitimizing the 2009 parliament members and ministers of the group. The three sanctions were: a U.S. bill Sanctioning Hezbollah’s use of civilians as defense shields, the second measure called on the European Union countries to designate Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, the third measure targeted the sources of financial support for the group.⁽⁵⁰⁾

Fourth: Morocco’s decision to sever diplomatic ties with Iran

Morocco cut its diplomatic ties with Iran on May 1, 2018 and expelled the Iranian ambassador in Rabat. Iran’s cultural attaché to Algeria Amir Mousavi was accused of coordinating and funding Hezbollah’s activities by training and arming the *Polisario Front* (a liberation movement which aims to end Morocco’s presence in the Western Sahara).⁽⁵¹⁾ The Moroccan

Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita stated that there is a relationship between the Polisario Front and Hezbollah adding, "Rabat has confirming information unveiling the military, logistic, and financial support Hezbollah provided to the Polisario Front."⁽⁵²⁾

The government spokesperson Mustapha El Khalfi stated that the Polisario Front members use Iranian passports to participate in international forums. The Iranian passports are provided by the Iranian embassy in Algeria.⁽⁵³⁾

The Moroccan politician Mohammed Boden said that Morocco-Iran relations were confined by mutual doubts adding that Morocco's decision blatantly shows an obvious gap between the two countries.⁽⁵⁴⁾ After the spread of Shiism across Morocco, several Moroccan media outlets published reports of the Moroccan Ministry of Interior unfolding that Iran used intelligent officers and clerics to spread Shiism in Morocco. The published reports warned of Shiite intelligence officer infiltrations amongst Moroccans and the looming threat of Iran's influence in Morocco, as well as highlighting the integral role Iran has played in the recent Moroccan unrest.⁽⁵⁵⁾

It is worth mentioning that the number of Shiites in Morocco is about 8,000 according to U.S. reports, however, Morocco estimated the number of its Shiite citizens is only 3,000.⁽⁵⁶⁾ The U.S. reports state that most of the Moroccan Shiites are from the educated class and upper class. This displeased the Moroccan authorities as they believe the motives of Shiism are political and not sectarian.⁽⁵⁷⁾

» Iran's reaction

Iran raised doubts regarding the Moroccan official statements. The Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Bahram Qasimi proclaimed that Moroccan officials faced difficulties to explain their decision as their justifications were flimsy and baseless.⁽⁵⁸⁾ "Iran never interferes in the domestic affairs of other countries without their request... some of the Gulf State like Saudi Arabia and UAE which have rock-solid relations with Morocco display a negative image in this regard," said Kamal Dehghani, a member of Iran's parliament and the Deputy Chairman of the Parliamentary Commission on National Security and Foreign Policy.⁽⁵⁹⁾

» Algeria's reaction

The Algerian Foreign Ministry called on the Moroccan ambassador to reject the claims of his country that Algeria collaborated with Iran to support the Polisario Front.⁽⁶⁰⁾ And that it confirms that the Moroccan accusations of Algeria sheltering "Hezbollah" to train the Polisario Front are "baseless."⁽⁶¹⁾

Iran and Algeria take the same position towards several regional and international issues. The two countries seek to boost their mutual economic relations. The Algerian ambassador to Iran pointed out to the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Javad Zarif on 2017 and stated that Iran and Algeria have positive political relations based on mutual respect and support. He added that the volume of trade exchange between the two countries is mounting up despite it has not reach the desired outcome. Now the trading volume is more than \$30 million.⁽⁶²⁾

Algerian activists and bloggers launched a campaign to expel Iran's cultural attaché to Algeria Amir Mousavi. The campaign spread like wildfire on social media and became a public demand. A few years ago, Algerians called for Mousavi to be expelled because his activities jeopardized Algerian national security as he established deep and intertwined relations with the Algerian community to spread Shiism.⁽⁶³⁾ The journalist Anwar Malik, one of the campaign activists, said that the campaign was launched over the suspicious activities of Mousavi in the Moroccan crisis. He added that the activists, since 2015, have raised concerns about the activities of the Iranian embassy in Algeria, however, the Algerian government decided to turn a deaf ear to such demands.⁽⁶⁴⁾

» Arab-Iran relationship

Type of relationship	States
Arab states preserving diplomatic ties with Iran	states: Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Qatar, Oman, 10 .Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, and Mauritania
Arab states decreasing diplomatic representation with Iran	.states: Kuwait, UAE, Jordan 3
Arab states severing diplomatic ties with Iran	states: Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Morocco, 9 Egypt, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti, Comoros

Apparently, most of the Arab states have strained relations with Iran. The three Arab state, Kuwait, UAE, and Jordan only decreased their diplomatic representation with Iran. The Arab states, which forged strong diplomatic ties with Iran, are usually within Iran’s sphere of influence such as Syria and Iraq or have strong economic relationship like Oman.

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INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

The US withdrawal from the nuclear deal and the Iranian reactions

On May 8, 2018, President Donald Trump announced the US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal signed with the P5 + 1 group and resumption of tough sanctions on Tehran. The US withdrawal was echoed in Iran by questioning the survival of the international pact and trying to find a way out of the bottleneck by trying to preserve the nuclear deal away from the United States, relying on the other par



» **Trump's withdrawal from the nuclear deal**

The US withdrawal from the nuclear deal was no surprise, but a vow taken by President Trump during his electoral campaign.⁽¹⁾ Since his inauguration, Trump has insisted on withdrawing from the nuclear deal if it is not amended, which has turned it into an empty and meaningless agreement. Despite signing the extension of sanctions relief and the exportation of Iran's oil for three times- in April and July 2017 and January 2018- in compliance with the nuclear deal, the Trump administration imposed sanctions on Iran's non-oil exports and on a number of prominent leaders and companies, individuals, and trade partners dealing with this country, which prevented Tehran from fully benefitting from the international pact.⁽²⁾

The United States will exert more pressure on Iran, especially in the economic sector under the directives of President Trump. To deprive Iran from the gains of the agreement the US president said that his administration would impose the highest level of economic sanctions on Iran and on all countries dealing with Tehran.⁽³⁾

Trump has made some changes to his advisors and government, which has consolidated his administration's view on Iran, leading to the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal. However, other parties outside the US administration opposed this decision, mainly, former US President Barack Obama who made a statement, describing Trump's decision as a "big mistake."⁽⁴⁾ This means that the American position on the nuclear deal is still controversial inside the United States, knowing that several American circles believe the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal is a serious problem.

» **New US sanctions on Iran**

Following Trump's announcement of withdrawal from the nuclear deal, Iran was exposed to unprecedented pressure to negotiate a new agreement that removes the American suspicions. This tendency was expressed by the US National Security Advisor, John Bolton who threatened to include the European companies in sanctions in case they continue doing business with Tehran when he said, "The European companies in Iran have six more months to withdraw from the country or face US sanctions," which complies with Trump's tendency as he signed a memorandum to start unprecedented sanctions on Iran on the same day the nuclear deal was revoked.

Trump's strategy on Iran seems to rely on exerting economic pressure on this country and its partners and this has been confirmed by the US Secretary of Treasury, Stephen Menochin who said, "The goal of President Trump of re-imposition of sanctions on Iran is to negotiate a new agreement." The US sanctions on Iran started with the cancellation of Iran's agreement to purchase Boeing and Airbus aircrafts while the US Treasury announced that financial sanctions and sanctions targeting the Iranian energy sector would be re-activated within three to six months.⁽⁵⁾ Indeed, as these sanctions come into effect, they will exert big pressure on the Iranian regime that might come to the table and negotiate a new agreement.

In addition, the US Treasury Department Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) has imposed sanctions on four individuals linked to the IRGC and the Lebanese Hezbollah, including Iran's Central Bank governor, Waliollah Saif and the Islamic Bank of Iraq.⁽⁶⁾ On May 16, 2018 the US Department of Treasury announced imposition of new sanctions on the Lebanese Hezbollah while a White House official described these sanctions as "part of a campaign targeting Hezbollah to limit Iran's influence that grants about \$700 million to this party annually to carry out operations and activities in the world."⁽⁷⁾

On May 25, 2018 the US Department of Treasury imposed sanctions on individuals and entities that bought spare parts and equipment in favor of Iranian companies involved in supporting terrorism and signed agreements in favor of Iranian airline companies, subject to sanctions, for charges of transporting weapons and soldiers to support terrorism. Sanctions also included two Iranians, Irge Ravnaqi and Torge Zanghanah and their company Dana Aviation in addition to the Turkish businessman, Gulenhal Yaghaneh and three of his

companies: Trigon Logistics, G3 Logistics, and IR Airlines in Istanbul and imposed sanctions on other airline companies such as Mahan, Caspian, Miraj, and Boya for the same charges.⁽⁸⁾ On May 30, 2017 the US Department of Treasury imposed other sanctions, including six Iranian individuals and three entities, including Evin prison in Tehran.⁽⁹⁾

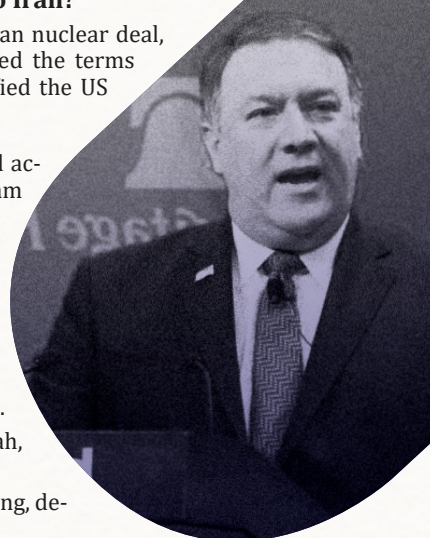
In addition, the inclusion of some non-Iranian individuals and companies in the sanctions reflects the US seriousness and ability to force countries and entities to comply with the sanctions imposed on Iran or else, they will face the same fate. In fact, most international companies and countries cannot deny working under the umbrella of the international economic system where the United States plays a key role in its administration for the sake of working with Iran, which is evident through the statement of the US Secretary of Treasury, "Countries and companies all over the world should be aware of the risks associated with granting landing rights and services to airlines utilized by Iran to export terrorism throughout the region."⁽¹⁰⁾

» **Pompeo's terms: what are the US demands given to Iran?**

On May 21, 2018, following the US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, the United States Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo announced the terms and conditions to negotiate a new nuclear treaty and identified the US demands as follows:⁽¹¹⁾

1. Give the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) a full account of the prior military dimensions of its nuclear program and where it had stopped.
2. Stop enrichment and never pursue plutonium reprocessing, including closing its heavy water reactor
3. Give the IAEA unqualified access to all Iranian nuclear sites.
4. End ballistic missile proliferation and stop the development of nuclear-capable missile systems.
5. Release all US citizens and citizens of US partners and allies.
6. End support to terrorist organizations, including Hezbollah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad.
7. Respect the sovereignty of the Iraqi government, by disarming, demobilization and reintegration of the Shia.
8. End support to Houthi rebels in Yemen and work towards a peaceful political settlement in that country.
9. Withdraw all forces under Iranian command throughout Syria.
10. End support for the Taliban and harboring senior Al-Qaeda leaders in Afghanistan.
11. End all IRGC Al-Quds Division activities and support for terrorists and militant partners around the world.
12. Stop threatening the US regional allies, including Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE and international shipping lanes.

Pompeo called these demands the key to reaching a new nuclear treaty with Iran and threatened Tehran with the "strongest sanctions in history" if the conditions are not met. In this concern, the United States is intensely exerting pressure on the Iranian regime to force it to respond to American demands that target the overall behavior of the Iranian regime rather than just negotiating a nuclear deal. Some observers believe that these demands are aimed to change the regime in Iran, not just to modify its behavior because the regime's response to these demands would undermine its legitimacy and slogans.⁽¹²⁾ However, from a different perspective, these conditions seem to open the door for negotiations again and giving Iran an opportunity to start a marathon negotiating process to win time. On the oth-



er hand, the United States did not set out plan B or a timetable in case Iran declines these conditions except the threat of sanctions that will face multiple challenges such as international commitment and consensus on isolating Iran. The other option for the United States is to confront Iranian behavior by force and this would be difficult as the United States current foreign policy does not incline towards direct military confrontation with Iran.

» **Iran's dilemma after the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal**

Iran is still counting on the survival of the nuclear deal by bypassing the United States and negotiating with the other signatories of the deal due to international positions opposing Trump's decision and the United Nations and Secretary-General positions, knowing that the International Atomic Energy Agency has released eleven official reports, stating that Iran's nuclear activities were peaceful, and that Iran was committed to its obligations. However, the Iranian regime is facing a real challenge posed by President Trump when he withdrew from the nuclear deal and adopted a tough strategy on Iran despite the international opposition to the American position and is currently facing intense internal and external pressures.⁽¹³⁾

As soon as President Trump announced the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal, the Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani warned that Iran could resume uranium enrichment. At the same time, Rouhani said that the United States had not and will not abide by its commitments, asserting that the nuclear deal is not a bilateral agreement between two countries, but an international pact, which reflects Iranian commitment to the deal until figuring out its gains, bypassing the United States position. The Iranian position was confirmed by Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif who said that Iran would make its final decision after touring the European signatories of the nuclear deal in a diplomatic attempt to figure out whether these parties could secure Iran's interests through a P4+1 group or not.⁽¹⁴⁾

Despite the Iranian efforts to preserve the nuclear deal, the Iranian decision makers remain uncertain if the Europeans can work independently from American influence or not as stated by Major General, Ali Jafari, the IRGC Commander-in-Chief when he said "It is clear that the Europeans cannot make an independent decision on Iran and the United States. They follow America and the fate of the nuclear deal has become clear."⁽¹⁵⁾

Iran has declined Pompeo's conditions and accused the United States of trying to undermine the Iranian regime as stated by Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif when he said "The United States administration has to study history before resuming the policy of illegal and imaginary regime change against Iran."

To test the ability of the European partners to preserve the nuclear deal, bypassing the United States position, Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei said, "It is illogical to remain in the nuclear deal with the other signatories without sufficient guarantees." Khamenei said the European countries involved in the nuclear deal must abide by the terms of the international pact such as protecting Iranian oil sales against US sanctions, buying Iranian crude oil, committing to protecting trade deals with Iran, and declining US demands to negotiate Iran's ballistic missile program and regional activities. If the Europeans fail to meet these terms, Khamenei threatened the resumption of uranium enrichment in Iran.⁽¹⁶⁾

At the diplomatic level, the Iranian regime tried to persuade the world public opinion of its case and present the United States as a violator and the main reason for undermining the nuclear deal.⁽¹⁷⁾ In this regard, Iran's Foreign Minister, Mohammed Javad Zarif wrote to the UN Secretary-General on May 14, 2018, accusing the United States of violating the UN Security Council Resolution 2231 concerning the nuclear deal and acting irresponsibly and unilaterally, which would have a devastating impact on all diplomatic rules.⁽¹⁸⁾

Recognizing the seriousness of the situation and the possibility of going back to sanctions and isolation, some Iranian officials started to talk about developing Iran's internal capabilities as stated by the Chief of the Judiciary, Ali Larijani,⁽¹⁹⁾ in addition to relying on local industry and Khamenei's idea of a resistant economy.

In addition, Iran threatened resuming uranium enrichment as stated by the Deputy Chairman of the National Security Committee, Mohammad Mahdi Broumundi about the meeting of the Chairman of the Iranian Atomic Energy Agency, Ali Akbar Salehi with the committee to present a report on the preparations for resuming Iranian nuclear activities.⁽²⁰⁾

All in all, the United States tends to exert more pressure on Iran. It tries to exploit the current internal unrest facing the Iranian regime and its involvement in several regional crises which have depleted Iranian capabilities. Basically, the United States will focus on economic sanctions that will aggravate the internal situation in Iran, reduce the regime's ability to continue direct and indirect interference in other countries, and restrict Iran's regional movement either directly or through US allies. In this context, the United States will restore the sanctions that had been imposed on Iran before the nuclear deal within three to six months as announced by the US Department of Treasury. However, the results will depend on the response of the international community to this policy and its efficiency in isolating Tehran.

On the other hand, Iran will strive to preserve the nuclear deal, relying on the other signatories of the agreement. Nevertheless, this will not prevent these countries from exerting pressure on Tehran to compromise and convince the United States to start a new round of negotiations. Indeed, Iran is expected to have difficult options, but it will continue eluding and buying time and threatening to escalate tensions through its proxies and the resumption of its nuclear activities. However, Tehran might sit on the negotiating table since the policy of resistance could cost its survival.

Consequences of the US withdrawal from the JCPOA on Iran's international relations

After concluding the nuclear deal in July 2015 and lifting the international sanctions, Iran achieved enormous economic gains as it was legitimately allowed to forge economic relations without being hindered by any sanctions. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) stated that the ballistic missile sanctions will be lifted within five years and conventional arms embargo will be lifted within eight years after the adoption day. This helped Iran re-establish diplomatic ties with European countries, strengthen its own position in accordance with its traditional allies and the international balance of power, and return to the international oil market.

After the US pull out from the JCPOA on May 8, 2018 and announcing a new strategy towards Iran on May 21, the new ground on which Iran built its international relations over the past three years almost collapsed. Iran now needs to find new paths to maintain its relations with international and regional powers, since the nuclear agreement will probably fail and sanctions will be re-imposed, taking into consideration that the United States imposed sanctions directly after one day of withdrawing from the nuclear agreement.

» Preserving the nuclear deal amongst divergent policies

The countries still in the nuclear deal believe that this agreement must continue and that they will not withdraw. However, they adopt divergent policies towards Iran after the US withdrawal. Russia adopts a clearly divergent position from the European countries, which is displayed as follows:

Russia, Iran's best ally and military partner in Syria, announced that it is in contact with the European countries and Iran to save the deal and that the US pulled out from.⁽²¹⁾ To save the Iran deal, Russia engaged in negotiations with Iran, asserting that Iran should make concessions. The Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said the nuclear deal with Iran could not be preserved without some concessions⁽²²⁾. Apparently, Russia believes that Iran is the biggest winner in the nuclear deal; therefore, Iran should make concessions for the sake of the countries still involved in the nuclear deal so they will not take the US position—in the light of the growing pressure they face from the United States. Though Russia affirmed

its commitment to the nuclear deal ,it will not play the role of a broker between the United States and Iran ⁽²³⁾.Ryabkov's remarks provoked the Iranians ,rejecting the position of their' ally' who seized the opportunity to place further pressure on their country and gain economic benefits in return .A week later ,Ryabkov denied making such a statement⁽²⁴⁾.

» European mediation efforts increase pressure

EU countries have played the broker role between Iran and the United States .They announced their commitment to the nuclear deal .Amid the US pressure ,they began talks with Iran within the negotiation period the United States announced ,ending on May,10 .2018France launched several initiatives– before the US pull out of the deal -but they all failed due to Iran's stubborn position and refusal to make any amendments in the nuclear deal or conclude a new complementary agreement .Iran categorically rejected US demands such as ending its pursuit of nuclear weapons ,allowing full U.N .access to all suspicious sites ,dismantling its long-range ballistic missile and nuclear weapon programs ,and ending its intervention in the Middle East⁽²⁵⁾.

The European mediation made Iran accuse all the European governments of playing the broker role to serve US interests .Iran threatened the European countries with cancelling the economic agreements signed with European companies and gave them a deadline to decide whether to complete working in Iran or canceling their contracts⁽²⁶⁾ .

Moreover ,according to the European countries ,the sanctions US imposed on Iran ,which targeted the foreign companies that do business in Iran infringe on national sovereignty. Most of the European companies quitted business with Iran following the US sanctions due to the huge volume of investments they already have in the US market ,surpassing the Iranian one and because most of their ownership shares belong to Americans or American companies .Apparently ,the United States can easily put further considerable pressures on Europeancompanies⁽²⁷⁾.

» The options left for Europe following the US sanctions

Standing at the crossroad ,European countries must choose between jeopardizing their companies in front of the US sanctions or canceling lavish contracts with Iran .The Europeans have a very weak bargaining power towards both sides .To bypass the US sanctions, they can activate the" Blocking Statute- "which was originally adopted against US sanctions on Cuba in -1996 however ,it has never been reactivated. The European Commissioner will activate this regulation in August 2018 that orders E.U .firms and courts not to comply with foreign laws and sanctions based on foreign court judgements .The European Commissioner took the measures needed to help the European Investment Bank) EIB (support and protect European investments in Iran ,especially small to medium-size EU firms .The European Parliament and the Council) state members(will have two months to object these measures⁽²⁸⁾.

On the other hand ,Iran continued to put pressure on the Europeans .Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei set out seven conditions to be met by the Europeans to preserve the nuclear deal .These are the list of conditions for the European countries:

1. The Europeans need to file a complaint to the UN Security Council to issue a resolution against US sanctions;



2. They must promise not to raise the issues of Iran's ballistic missile program and regional affairs;
3. The European banks safeguard transactions with Iran;
4. They must guarantee purchasing oil from Iran;
5. They must "make up for that silence" on the repeated US violations of the JCPOA;
6. They must address the US sanctions imposed on Iran;
7. "Iran reserves the right to resume nuclear activities if conditions not met."⁽²⁹⁾

The European response has been almost muted. The French Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman stated that the [European countries] have taken into consideration Khamenei's conditions, adding "we should not let the EU desire to save the nuclear deal make us overlook the concerns we have towards Iran, especially its ballistic missile program and its direct and indirect military presence in the Middle East."⁽³⁰⁾

Iran bets on the EU holding onto the nuclear deal and the possibility of the EU meeting two main conditions Khamenei set out: European countries will continue purchasing Iran's oil and the European banks will secure Iran's transactions because these are same targets as the EU. The EU firms can bypass the US sanctions because their oil import and bank transactions are subject to EU regulations. Additionally, by maintaining stable relations with EU Iran can alleviate some of the pressure it faces now regarding its ballistic missile program and regional affairs in the Middle East. Probably, Iran can make the EU meet four of Khamenei's seven conditions.

» Seizing the opportunity

Russia finds a win-win opportunity to aggregate economic gains in Iran's international crisis. It can terminate Iran's military presence in Syria and win an absolute dominance over Syrian territories. One hour after the US pull out of the nuclear deal, Israel launched airstrikes against Iranian military sites in Syria South of Damascus in Al Kiswah.⁽³¹⁾ Two days later, on May 10, Israeli fighter jets attacked 70 Iranian targets in Syria.⁽³²⁾ Russia remained silent following the Israeli attacks against Iranian targets. On May 18, Russia President Vladimir Putin when meeting with Assad at the Sochi summit said, "foreign forces must leave Syrian territories."⁽³³⁾

Russian Presidential Special Representative for Syria Alexander Lavrentyev clarified that what Putin meant about "foreign forces" is all the foreign military units including the American and Turkish ones, and, of course, the forces of Lebanese Hezbollah and Iran.⁽³⁴⁾

Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Bahram Qasemi responded saying "no one can force Iran to do anything. Iran is an independent state that shapes its policies according to its national interest in the region and the world. Iran's presence in Syria was upon the request of the Syrian government. Those who entered the Syrian territories without the permission of the Syrian government and violated the Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity must leave Syria."⁽³⁵⁾

Iran's rejection of Russia's statement did not hinder Russia to move forward on implementing its decision to expel Iranian forces from Syria. The Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman met with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Shoigu, in Moscow and discussed the Israeli previous demand that calls for the pullout of all Iranian forces from Syria and not only the territories bordering Northern Israel.⁽³⁶⁾ It seems a deal has been evolved between Israel and Russia to force Iran's troops to depart Syria. Despite all of this, Iran could not stop cooperating with Russia at all levels while Russia continues reaping big gains from its economic relations with Iran such as the Preferential Trade Agreement concluded between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) to set mutual tariff reductions.⁽³⁷⁾

» **Russian success and European failure**

The European countries and Russia have a mutual desire to save the nuclear deal as they all have common economic interests with Iran. However, the European countries could have used sufficient leverage to make Iran accept the US terms before its withdrawal from the nuclear deal or at least preserve their interests. The European failure, in this regard, might be due to the growing pressure they face from the European Commissioner, which always supports Iran. The European Commissioner's continuous support to Iran might stem from a leftover from the Obama administration's policy or a desire to take an independent policy from the Trump administration's policy. Here we must take into consideration the United States and European Union fundamental disagreements, such as over financial contributions to NATO and US tariff policy as well as EU concerns of the expected rise in oil prices. On the other hand, by launching diplomatic maneuvers, Russia brought Iran under its control and used the military coalition in Syrian territories as a bargaining chip against Iran. In the light of the Iranian need to sell oil to Europe, the European countries should have taken a different policy to serve their interests, i.e., they should have taken a stance like that of Russia.

» **China Iran's permanent trading partner**

China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying assured her country's commitment to the nuclear deal and rejection of the US unilateral sanctions – according to its court rulings-outside the UN Umbrella⁽³⁸⁾.

According to Iran, China is now the number one trading partner. China receives a third of Iranian crude export. Iran's export to China mounted up to 8.7\$ billion and its imports from China reached 10.7\$ billion in⁽³⁹⁾ 2017. Moreover, China executes many projects in Iran, most prominently developing Iran's South Pars Gas and Oil Field, which French Total co-develops. China's commitment made Iran announce that if the EU firms leave their projects, it will hand over their projects to Chinese and national firms.

If the EU firms do not continue their projects because of US sanctions, the Chinese firms can be their agents in Iran, especially giant Chinese companies as they do not do business in the US market, accordingly, they will avoid US sanctions.

India has adopted the same position of China. India's Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Ravesh Kumar, said India will not implement the unilateral sanctions imposed on Iran unless they are issued from the US Security Council⁽⁴⁰⁾. He confirmed that India will continue its economic cooperation with Iran, especially its crude import. Therefore, it is difficult to impose an economic blockade or oil embargo on Iran.

Interaction of events

- » On May 8, US President Donald Trump decided to withdraw from the JCPOA signed with the P5 + 1 group
- » The United States announced a six-month period for the EU firms to withdraw from Iran or face US sanctions.
- » On May 21, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the US terms to forge a new agreement with Iran.
- » Iran's President Hassan Rouhani stated that his country is ready to return to uranium enrichment.
- » Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei laid out seven conditions the EU countries should meet to keep the nuclear deal.

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Conclusion

Internal Affairs

- » The Iranian religious institution has expressed its fear of growing corruption and worsening economic conditions, to an extent threatening the clergy's long-term influence.
- » The report revealed the loss of popular support for clerics in Iranian society, which reflects their state of isolation and how they have become a ruling political elite lacking mass influence and an inability to mobilize people.
- » -It was clear that the Supreme Leadership institution was indifferent by its statements, which give a clear indication of the weak authority of clerics and senior Marja figures, reinforcing the prevailing stereotype that the Supreme Leadership institution controls the process of political decision making, or at least a few clerics and the Revolutionary Guards leaders govern the affairs of the state, without going back or listening to senior marja who had taken part in the success of the revolution and the establishment of the state.
- » Rouhani's nonappearance at Expediency Discernment Council meetings deepens the differences between the Iranian elite, as well as reflecting the lack of clarity on the limits and responsibilities of institutions in Iran.
- » Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi appeared as an undesirable element for presidency; therefore, this position could affect his acceptability among the reformists, while there is a discussion about the possibility of his succession to Khamenei as Supreme Leader.
- » Iran was able to establish military cooperation with many countries around world, including Arab, Islamic and Latin countries.
- » There have not been enough legal efforts to stop Iran's military cooperation with the rest of the world based on UN resolutions.
- » Some cases of Iran's international military cooperation reflect its desire to strengthen its diplomatic relations with these countries more than genuine military cooperation.
- » Omani-Iranian military cooperation violates the unity of the Gulf and Arab ranks in facing Iran.
- » The Iranian-Latin military cooperation is directed to confront the United States and to consolidate the presence of Iran and Hezbollah in Latin America.
- » The personal interests of parliamentarians and Iranian officials played an important role in modifying the administrative divisions.

- » The weak infrastructure and development reinforces the call for the establishment of administrative units in various Iranian provinces.
- » The recent protests in Iran have earned Iranians the courage to claim their rights despite the repression practiced by the police.
- » A group of European and American investors left Iran after US sanctions even before the 180-day deadline given by the US administration to avoid paying fines. This reflects the US influence, the importance of the US market for these companies and the high degree of overlapping interests.
- » The Iranian crude exports are likely to fall if the US exerts pressure on its allies from the Iranian oil importers such as Europe, Japan, and South Korea through bank transfers, insurance companies, and oil transport. The projections indicate a decline in the daily exports reaching 300,000 barrels or more.

Arab Affairs

- » The Iranian project in Syria has been under unprecedented strong blows that will have an impact on the future of the Iranian militias in Syria. In addition to the American-Israeli strikes on Iranian sites in Syria, Russia, the ally of Iran in Syria, disappointed Iran because of its agreement with Israel against Iranian presence affecting negatively the Iranian corridor linking Tehran to the Mediterranean which costs Iran substantial losses because of its huge financial support for the Iranian military and non-military fighters in Syria.
- » Iran has been inflicted with severe damage in the Iraqi file because of al-Sadr's current victory in the Iraqi election, along with him announcing the biggest coalition to form a government without Amiri and Maliki. If the pro-Sadr bloc forms the new government, then we will be in front of a turning point and a new Iraqi situation which is against the Iranian project in Iraq, as well as, there will be an opportunity for Iraq to be part of the Arab surrounding because of those who support the Arabism of Iraq.
- » Hezbollah's new position has strengthened the Iranian presence in Lebanon and the party's victory in the Lebanese election reinforced its active role in choosing the speaker of parliament, appointing the prime minister, distributing key ministerial portfolios, choosing the President of the Republic in the future, the possibility of legitimizing its weapon, as well as continuing its foreign activities. This calls for greater international efforts to confront the threat of the growing role of Hezbollah in Lebanon, the legitimizing of its armaments and the extension of its foreign activities.
- » The United States has realized the danger of the growing influence of Hezbollah in Lebanon and outside Lebanon resulting in it imposing sanctions different from all previous ones, because they include the political and military branches of the party. The significance of this policy politically is important because it withdraws confidence and legitimacy from the party's deputies and ministers in the government. This means that there is a possibility of imposing sanctions on the Lebanese government in the future; therefore, it would put the Lebanese government under severe pressure as some regional and international governments may refuse to engage with the new Lebanese government for fear of possible sanctions.
- » The Kingdom of Morocco has realized the dangers of the Iranian project. For this reason, it has joined the countries that have severed the ties with Iran, which increases the chances of downsizing the Iranian role, especially in the light of the regional and international siege imposed on Iranian activities since Trump took over the presidency in the US.

International affairs

- » Trump has succeeded in fulfilling part of his promise to withdraw from the nuclear deal, his administration put in an enormous effort to undermine the agreement completely, otherwise, the United States may have lost its bet to withdraw from the agreement.
- » The US decision confused the internal Iranian arena and threatened the investment of many foreign companies which had entered the Iranian market after the signing of the agreement in 2015, and these companies find themselves in a dilemma, as they will be targeted by the US sanctions if they insisted on keeping their Investments inside Iran.
- » Iran's posture on the nuclear agreement is not clear yet, whether to withdraw from the agreement, stay in it or to bet on the European Union.
- » Israel engaged in the conflict as a serious and effective side after the US withdrawal from the agreement and this was evident from its strikes towards Syrian territory to reduce the influence of Iran there.
- » The rules of Iran's international relations changed after the US withdrew from the nuclear agreement.
- » Russia has been able to maximize its gains out of its relationship with Iran as a result of the increased international pressure on Iran.
- » Iran succeeded in exerting pressure on Europe and offered its conditions to stay in the nuclear deal, although Iran needs to maintain the agreement more than the Europeans.
- » China decided to continue its economic cooperation with Iran regardless of any US sanctions against Iran, and expressed its willingness to continue its oil imports from Iran, and to refill the gap made by the European companies withdrawal from the Iranian market. India also adopts the same stance.



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MAY 2018



RASANAH
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