

MONTHLY REPORT



# IRAN CASE FILE

JULY 2018

Your window on Iran  
from in side and abroad



**RASANAHA**  
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July 2018

## CONTENTS

Executive Summary .....	4
Internal Affair.....	8
Political File.....	8
Military File .....	13
Security File.....	15
Economic File .....	16
Ideological File .....	21
Arab Affair.....	28
First: Iran and Iraqi protests in Southern provinces.....	29
Second: Iran’s incursion in Syria amid regional and international movements .....	33
Third: The area of influence and control.....	37
International Affair .....	42
US-Iran Relations: Mutual Threats and Intense Pressures .....	42
The Iranian movements in the face of US pressures.....	45
Russia-Iran Relations: Ali Akbar Velayati’s visit to Moscow: Aims and repercussions.....	47
Trump-Putin Summit in Helsinki and its relationship to the Iranian issue.....	49
Conclusion.....	53



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report tracks the most important developments in Iran in the month of July 2018. It gives an extensive analysis of the Iranian state and its reactions towards these developments on the internal, Arab, and international levels.



## INTERNAL AFFAIR

### Politics

This part of the report discusses President Rouhani's threats of closing the Straits of Hormuz and the sudden change in the hardliners position towards the Iranian president and his position in this regard.

### Military and Security

The report handles the Iranian plans to produce and improve more than 700 thousand tanks. The report also discusses the latest security developments in the Sistan and Baluchistan province and the attacks of the Balochi militants on Basij forces and border guards that resulted in the killing of three Iranian soldiers.

### Economics

The US sanctions on Iran come into effect on July 6, 2018. Some Iranian officials called for the necessity to adopt the policy of the so-called, "Resistance Economy" that relies on domestic production to replace imports and foreign investment. They also called for adopting new ideas such as establishing a local stock market to sell oil to the private sector, alluding to government interference by the IRGC semi-governmental institutions that will penetrate the state's economic structure more significantly.



On the other hand, the policy of “Resistance Economy” will face real challenges such as smuggling that has existed in Iran before the 1979 revolution until today. This phenomenon reflects the significant size of corruption in Iran and the power of networks supporting smuggling. The idea of a resistance economy could be more efficient in a self-sufficient economy in all sectors, but Iran relies on foreign sources to buy crude materials, intermediate products, and spare parts. Hence, the nuclear deal had been a good opportunity for Iran to improve its industries and machinery or else, these equipment would age with less production capacity and lack of competitiveness. The more the country limits importation to maintain its decreasing inventory of the US dollar; smuggling would increase and hinder the policy of self-sufficiency, resulting in the availability of highly competitive smuggled goods and regression in local production. The report also discusses the impact of US sanctions on the Iranian economy; specifically, a decline of oil exports unless buyers receive a waiver from the United States in the middle of Iranian threats to close the Straits of Hormuz.

Because of US sanctions, foreign companies have left the Iranian market while some Iranian companies have increased their investment in the Turkish real-estate market. In addition, some voices have called for activation of the policy of “Resistance Economy” and others called for a cabinet reshuffle that led to the replacement of the Central Bank Governor. This was because of the devaluation of the Toman against the USD, resulting in demonstrations in most Iranian provinces.

## **Ideology**

The report handled several intellectual and jurisprudential (Hawza) questions in Iran that combine both politics and ideology together. The report focuses on two issues that have significantly influenced Iranian jurisprudence: Sectarianism and the Hawza while the second focuses on the Iranian authorities and the growing crisis of the Hijab.

## **ARAB AFFAIR**

*This part of the report focuses on three aspects:*

1. Iran’s relation to demonstrations in the Iraqi Southern provinces that started in the oil-rich province of Basra and then, spread in the other Southern provinces-Najaf, Misan, Dhi Qar, Muthana, Babylon, Karbala, Qadisiyyah, and Baghdad. The report handles the nature, direction, and the future of these demonstrations by analyzing their starting point, geographic spread, and the tools of pressure used by the protestors. Also the slogans, motives, the timing of the demonstrations at both the internal and external levels, the involvement of others behind these demonstrations, and how the Iraqi government dealt with the demands of the protestors, as well as, finally, the momentum and Iran’s role in these demonstrations are analyzed.
2. The Iranian interference in Syria and regional and international positions on this interference. The report handles the Iranian presence in Syria and its arms, financial, and training support to the Syrian regime and to the Public Mobilization Forces (PMF). It also discusses the Iranian forces participation in military operations in Southern Syria near the Israeli-Jordanian borders side by side with the Syrian forces and the intense tours of Iranian officials before the meeting of the Russian and US presidents on June 16, 2018, to preserve Iranian gains in Syria and achieve its goals in this country. In addition, the report analyzes the factors impacting the Iranian role in Syria such as the Trump-Putin meeting, the Israeli demand of driving Iranian militias out of Syria, Netanyahu’s visit to Moscow and his rejection of moving these militias 80 kilometers away from the Israeli borders, and the Israeli military strikes on Iranian militias considering its insistence on driving them out of Syria.
3. The latest developments in Yemen. The report discusses the progress of the legitimate forces and decline of the Houthis’ influence in Yemen. It also tracks the Iranian-backed Houthi violations, the ballistic missile attacks on Saudi Arabia, and the targeting a Saudi oil tanker in the international shipping lanes in the Red Sea.

## **INTERNATIONAL AFFAIR**

### **The US-Iran Relations**

The report discusses US-Iran relations after the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal and before the first set of US sanctions on Iran which came into force on August 6, 2018. In fact, relations between the two countries severed and both sides launched a war of words and mutual threats of using military power and targeting each other’s interests. The report also analyzes the US pressures on Iran by imposing additional sanctions,

enhancing cooperation with its allies to tighten the sanctions, and exerting pressures on Iran's partners and countries willing to do business with this country to isolate it and exert pressures on its economy and financial system. On the other hand, the report handles the Iranian movements in the face of US pressures and the possibility to hold talks to resolve the disagreements between the two countries with Omani mediation.

### **Russia-Iran Relations**

The report sheds light on the visit of Ali Akbar Velayati to Russia that coincided with the visit of the Israeli Prime Minister to this country and in the middle of US pressures on Iran after the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal. Through the visit, Iran tried to gain Russian support in the face of the US sanctions and coordinate its role in Syria with Moscow. Finally, the report discusses the impact of the meeting of the US President and his Russian counterpart in Helsinki on Russia-Iran relation.



## **INTERNAL AFFAIR**

### **Political File**

Rouhani's tough rhetoric causes big transformations in his relationship with the conservatives

Since coming to power in 2013, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has been facing a fierce attack and a wave of criticism by the conservative movement because of his soft position when it comes to dealing with internal and external issues as well as engaging in standoffs and conflicts with the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Also, President Rouhani has been at loggerheads with the conservatives over Iran's foreign policy and the nuclear deal. The dispute between the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and President Rouhani escalated to the point of Khamenei branding the latter as a traitor and threatening to depose him. The regime hinted at repeating the scenario that happened in 1981 to Abu Hassan Bani Sadr (the first elected president after the 1979 revolution). This is in addition to his ongoing differences with the Revolutionary Guard commanders, most recently in July 2018, when he openly engaged in a war of words with the Commander of the Al Quds Force Qassem Soleimani.

In this context, the Iranian newspaper Jahan Sanat reported that the verbal standoff between President Rouhani and the Soleimani took place during the Eid Fitr ceremony. It happened after Soleimani criticized President Rouhani for not allocating additional money to the Revolutionary Guards and the Al Quds Force in the 2018-2019 budget. But the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani intervened to mediate between the two men and ended the dispute between them.<sup>(1)</sup>

The pressure from the conservatives on President Rouhani continued, especially after the US withdrawal from the nuclear agreement, its threats to re-impose sanctions, a hike in prices and the continual deterioration in living conditions because of a fall in the value of the national currency, as well as, a rise in protests in various Iranian cities. They called for a cabinet reshuffle starting with President Rouhani's economic team. Then they called for dismissing the whole cabinet.

But tension in the relationship between President Rouhani and the conservatives ended or perhaps (has been suspended) with one statement made by President Rouhani on the sidelines of his visit to Switzerland in early July 2018. He hinted that the Straits of Hormuz could be closed to shipments of oil from neighboring countries if the world's countries respond to the US demand not to buy Iranian oil.<sup>(2)</sup>

Immediately after the announcement, Soleimani sent a letter to President Rouhani praising him. He considered the threat to close the Straits of Hormuz and preventing oil exports in the region as a source of pride and prestige.

In the letter he sent to President Rouhani, Soleimani said, "I kiss your (Rouhani's) hand for expressing such wise and timely comments, and I am at your service to implement any policy that serves the Islamic Republic." He added, "This is Dr. Rouhani that we all are aware of his wisdom."<sup>(3)</sup>

President Rouhani's attempts to mend relations between his government and the conservatives started in June 2018, when he addressed his opponents, saying "I, as the representative of the people, kiss the hands of all the Iranians, and even the hands of those who leveled the harshest criticism at my government. We should show the world that we are capable of overcoming problems and impediments facing us. But we will not give up our dignity, our freedom, our independence, our democracy, our republic, our religion and our culture."<sup>(4)</sup> The speech was widely welcomed among conservatives. But the message sent by Soleimani to President Rouhani resounded with the conservatives and Revolutionary Guards' commanders, such as the Commander-in-Chief of the Guards Mohammad Ali Jafari, the former Revolutionary Guards Commander Yahya Rahim Safavi and the Deputy Chief of Sarallah Headquarters Ismail kowsari.<sup>(5)</sup>

Following the praise that came from the IRGC commanders, the Supreme Leader lauded



President Rouhani's threats and described them as important remarks that reflect the regime's policy and method.<sup>(6)</sup> One of the staunchest opponents of President Rouhani, the Head of the judiciary Sadiq Larijani who engaged previously in fierce public debates with the reformist leader, lauded him, saying 'his opinion, expressed in the threats, is the opinion of the Iranian regime and people'.<sup>(7)</sup> Then came praises from Hussein Shariatmadari, who is close to the Supreme Leader and the editor in Chief of Keyhan newspaper, the former mayor of Tehran, the former presidential candidate Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, and Saeed Jalili. Also, several conservatives such as Ali Reza Zakani, the former minister

of education in Ahmadinejad's government, and the head of the of the Velaya bloc in the Iranian parliament Hamid Reza Haji Babai lauded the comments.<sup>(8)</sup>

After this gushing praise by the conservatives and the IRGC commanders, President Rouhani escalated his tough rhetoric and continued to make statements and launch threats which resound with the conservatives. Addressing a gathering of Iranian diplomats on Sunday, July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018, President Rouhani warned President Trump against playing with the lion's tail, saying "America should know peace with Iran is the mother of all peace, and war with Iran is the mother of all wars."<sup>(9)</sup>

After Rouhani's threats, president Trump responded on Twitter. He said "To Iranian President Rouhani: NEVER, EVER THREATEN THE UNITED STATES AGAIN OR YOU WILL SUFFER CONSEQUENCES THE LIKES OF WHICH FEW THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE EVER SUFFERED BEFORE. WE ARE NO LONGER A COUNTRY THAT WILL STAND FOR YOUR DEMENTED WORDS OF VIOLENCE & DEATH. BE CAUTIOUS!"



**Donald J. Trump** ✓  
@realDonaldTrump

Following



To Iranian President Rouhani: NEVER, EVER THREATEN THE UNITED STATES AGAIN OR YOU WILL SUFFER CONSEQUENCES THE LIKES OF WHICH FEW THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE EVER SUFFERED BEFORE. WE ARE NO LONGER A COUNTRY THAT WILL STAND FOR YOUR DEMENTED WORDS OF VIOLENCE & DEATH. BE CAUTIOUS!

### The significance of the sudden shift in the conservatives' position

The conservatives made various cases for supporting President Rouhani's remarks. Some said they have backed President Rouhani because of his speeches that urge unity. Others cited his positions against the US and Israel. Some, such as Soleimani, supported President Rouhani after the latter threatened to close the Strait of Hormuz to international navigation if Iran is deprived of exporting its oil.<sup>(10)</sup>

But these threats by President Rouhani represented a godsend for the conservative movement to return to its hawkish rhetoric and to send a message that all political spectrums would unite if the country was exposed to external threats. As to President Rouhani, the conservatives' position in support of his latest moves has been an appropriate opportunity to ease the pressure on his government as a result of the worsening economic situation, rising inflation, unemployment, and poverty.

Soleimani wanted his message to President Rouhani to say that the apparatus of the Iranian regime is coherent and that there is a unified position between the President and the Revolutionary Guard on the key issues that threaten the regime. He may have also used these remarks to push President Rouhani to adopt harsher stances, so as to neutralize him and prevent his meddling in the policies of the IRGC at home and abroad. The conservative moves to support President Rouhani's remarks may also represent a major step towards reforming the home front to calm the Iranian street, which is fed up with the economic situation, economic sanctions, and Western pressure.

But there are those who believe that the goal of the support that President Rouhani received was to protect the regime from the threats surrounding it, not because of its position on Israel, the threat to close the Strait of Hormuz or even the call for national unity in the face of US threats and economic sanctions. They cited the last phrase in Soleimani's message to President Rouhani, where he said, "I am at your service to implement any policy that serves the Islamic Republic."<sup>(11)</sup>

### The reformists' position on Rouhani's threats

The reformists were increasingly skeptical that President Rouhani may shift his position to the conservative camp after he won the second presidential term in May 2017. When the time came to form the government, everyone believed the reformists who played a big role in President Rouhani's victory in the elections would receive the largest share of ministerial posts or at least be consulted in the process of determining the shape of the new government. But the cabinet reshuffle disappointed the reformists after it included several conservatives.

The controversy in the Iranian street continued over President Rouhani's alignments during the period following the last presidential elections. Some asserted that President Rouhani did not change positions that support and favor the reformists. And others said that President Rouhani renounced his previous position backing reform and moderation



after he guaranteed to get elected for a second term.

President Rouhani's latest positions, especially after his remarks on closing the Strait of Hormuz left the reformist forces in disarray when it comes to the future. They don't know whether President Rouhani would continue to adopt a fundamental posture even if it shall lead to a confrontation with the US and its allies.<sup>(12)</sup>

The reformists who want President Rouhani to be a defender of moderation and reform, fear that President Rouhani will have to turn to the conservative camp and yield in the face of extreme pressure exerted by them. They fear these pressures will make him change his position on several issues at home and abroad.

Others said President Rouhani had already walked away from his moderate policies and edged closer to the conservatives. They argued that President Rouhani's new alignment was due to the pressures and recent calls by the hardliners on the government to resign. This is in addition to the cooling in President Rouhani's relations with the reformists who believe he owes them as large public support that got him to be reelected was because of their support.<sup>(13)</sup>

But Iranian presidential adviser Murtaza Bank defended President Rouhani. He said, "Rouhani, who ruled the country during the first term of his presidency, did not change his position in the second term, and his recent positions do not mean in any way that he is walking away from his moderate stances". He argued the comments came to preserve national interests.

Ali Sufi, the minister of cooperation under the former president Mohammed Khatami, rejected the accusations leveled at President Rouhani that he has turned to the camp of the conservatives. He said these charges defy logic, arguing that the convergent views of officials in the event of crises are imperative<sup>(14)</sup>

The journalist and reformist activist Ahmad Zeid Abadi presented a breakdown of President Rouhani's character and his statements from a psychological perspective. He said that President Rouhani is not a very complicated character and he is not engaged in complicated relationships as some people believe. He said the threats launched by President Rouhani from time to time do not involve any specific or clear program. He also argued that the increasing crises at home made him make comments and take decisions that tend towards the conservative rhetoric at times and side with the moderates on other occasions. Based on this analysis, Abadi believes that looking for any programs or future projects behind any remarks made by President Rouhani may be a complete waste of time. At the same time, he did not rule out the possibility that President Rouhani deliberately means to be ambiguous in his positions and remarks, arguing this may be a tactic by the reformist leader to earn more time.<sup>(15)</sup>

## MILITARY FILE

### Iranian plans to boost its military forces with homemade tanks

After the revolution victory in 1979, the Iranian stockpile of weapons declined significantly, especially after the United States deprived the Iranian regime of its arms. This called on Iran to import arms from China and Russia as an alternative to the advanced US weapons. The Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988) also contributed to the reduction of Iranian military equipment.<sup>(16)</sup>

Despite the increase in Iranian military expenditure recently, Iran is still unable to import sophisticated weapons from the United States and European countries because of sanctions imposed against it. The US weapons, which are a significant percentage of the army's arsenal, have been kept unused because of a shortage of spare parts. On the other side, local-made weapons are still insufficient compared to the weapons and technology owned by the armies of neighboring countries.

Iran has about 2931 tanks,<sup>(17)</sup> most of them are old dating back to the Shah era. In fact, Iran's last military deal was with Russia in the early nineties to modernize its army with several T-72 tanks, which are one of the most developed tanks in its traditional arsenal nowadays.<sup>(18)</sup>

The Iranian combat tanks consist of M 47, 48, 60, 60 and Chieftain, T 55, 62, and 72 tanks. As well as Zulfikar1 tanks, which were first manufactured in 1991, they are similar to the M48 tank's structure with the smoothbore gun derived from the T72 tank and Russian engines. Zulfikar1 tank was then developed into Zulfikar 2 and 3. In addition, the Iranian ground forces integrated the Karrar tank, which is similar to the T-72 smoothbore gun and T-90 MS structure.<sup>(19)</sup>

Over the past years, Iran intends to modernize the British tank, Chieftain, naming it Mobariz. It also developed tanks such as T54, M60, and M47, calling them Safir Samasam and Tiam.<sup>(20)</sup>

On July 18, 2018, for reinforcing its armed forces deployed in the country, the Iranian Ministry of Defense announced that it is preparing for manufacturing and modernizing



more than 700 tanks. In this regard, the Deputy Defense Minister Reza Muzaffari Nia said “the ministry’s plan is based on manufacturing 50 to 60 tanks annually and an adequate budget has been allocated for the urgent need by the army and the IRGC,<sup>(21)</sup>” but he did not mention the categories of the targeted tanks or even the quantity provided for each category.

Dorud County in Lorestan Province had the main factory for modernizing tanks in the 1960s, before the revolution. In the 1990s, this factory contributed to assembling 400 T-72 tanks, which were incomplete when they were purchased.<sup>(22)</sup>

After the Iran-Iraq war, the Iranian regime manufactured its first national tank, Zulfikar1, urgently. This tank was developed between the structure of the M-60 power unit and the T-72 smoothbore gun, but the external model was designed by the Iranian army. Zulfikar2 and 3 are also counted as national products with some improvements in their specifications and appearances. As illustrated in the picture, Zulfikar and the American tank M1 Abrams are similar, in terms of their outer structure.<sup>(23)</sup>

The specifications of Zulfikar 3 are dubious, especially the storage of ammunition. However, Zulfikar 3 is believed to have T-72 tank’s vulnerability. This tank is lethal, in case it is penetrated through its ammunition; therefore, the turret is often separated off from its hull as what T-72 tanks faced in Syria. The only possible way to check if the Iranians have adopted storing ammunition similar to T-72 or the Abrams is by looking at the turret if there are exit doors of flame to save the tank crew as in the Abrams when the ammunition burst.

The US analyst Farzin Nadimi, a specialist in the security and defense of Iran and the Gulf, said there were doubts whether the Zulfikar 3 tank was not manufactured for technical and financial reasons. Instead, Iran has repaired and refurbished T-72 of the Rand seized the Revolutionary Guards and Abrams tanks after the 2003 US-led war on Iraq modifying it as Iranian-produced tanks.<sup>(24)</sup>

Observers have doubted Iran’s claim of manufacturing a new homemade combat tank called “Karar”. They considered the Iranian media news around this issue as means to pressure Russia for economic purposes. The “Karrar” tank (shown above) is a T-72 tank with T-90S specifications (shown at the bottom of the image) with some modifications to look different. Obviously, the photographs published by Iranian media about the tank “Karar” from inside raised many questions about the presence of such a tank.<sup>(25)</sup>

Although there are some doubts regarding Russian contribution in modernizing the “Karar” tank, for the time being, we do not have enough evidence to prove so. Supposedly, Iran may seek to manufacture a local combat tank, but it realizes the technical challenges ahead, which in turn may affect the tanks performance. To overcome these challenges, Iran needs foreign assistance to rehabilitate its factories by finding suitable technical equipment, which is banned currently under the Security Council resolution 2231, that controls weapon deals to Iran directly and indirectly.<sup>(26)</sup>

## SECURITY FILE

### Baluch militants killed, 2 Basij and a border guard.

Poverty and inequality are the main reasons for tensions in the Sistan-Baluchistan region. It has been neglected and the majority lacks decent living conditions. In addition, more than half of the population is covered by the Supply and Relief Committee.

The region's economy is most likely based on agriculture and animal farming. However, this was affected after the river Hermand dried, the flow of the Sistan river this year fell by 98% and the shortage of rain was less than 10 millimeters. Others in the region depend on cross-border commercial transactions, which are affected by several obstacles.<sup>(27)</sup>



Consequently, this has led to security, political and military unrest. In fact, these areas witnessed several and continuous military clashes between militants, the Revolutionary Guards and border guards resulting in dozens of soldiers being killed or injured:

1. In Sistan and Baluchistan regions, the public relations department of the 110th Division of Salman al-Farsi in the IRGC reported the killing of two Basij force soldiers in the Kurin Zahedan area; Ali Reza Shah Bakhsh and Parvez Shah Bakhsh during armed clashes in Corinne Zahedan.<sup>(28)</sup>

2. A border guard Hussein Fannai was killed in a clash with gunmen in Lar, an area near the Pakistani-Iranian border.<sup>(29)</sup>

The Commander of Iran's police force, Hossein Ashrawi, admitted the so-called "bad guys and enemies of the revolution" have increased their military attacks on Iran's border recently. He accused third parties not named by supporting the militants and he also mentioned that the security forces managed to thwart several armed operations, so on the other side there were many casualties;<sup>(30)</sup> with regard to this, three soldiers in Sistan and Baluchistan and 11 members of the Basij forces were killed and eight others injured in an attack by gunmen against the base of the Basij force in the Dre village, Kurdistan region.<sup>(31)</sup>



## ECONOMIC FILE



The economic file discusses in two parts the most related economic issues in July. The first part deals with what is known as the resistance economy, its tools, and its effectiveness, especially in the view of the growing opinion to resist US sanctions. The second part discusses the most notable economic developments in some economic sectors and the possible implications for them.

### **First: The resistance economy as a mechanism to face US sanctions**

While Iran's Riyal plunged to 112,000 IRR/USD in late June, losing 45% of its market value since the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal on May 8, a growing opinion has emerged to take on board a resistance economy policy, which has also been championed by Supreme Leadership, to face US sanctions post its withdrawal from the nuclear deal.

Iran's resistance economy is based on an import substitution policy and it encourages local products over foreign ones. However, Iranian leaders are not able to distinguish between a resistance economy, which encourages the private sector, and a dominant state, which monopolizes economic activity and the production process. This tendency represents a typical image of the Iranian economy since the revolution until now. Article 44 of its constitution stipulates that the state owns most of the means of production in

all productive sectors and monitors all private industries, banks, aviation, shipping, sea, air and ground transportation as well as foreign trade.

### **The available tools to activate the resistance economy**

One of the most important tools for the resistance economy is to increase production. The government's dominance of its economy has meant it providing subsidies to support its national commodity, controlling the means of production and increasing monopolies in the market because of the weak contribution of the private sector to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The government's interference could weaken the possibility of productive private projects to compete with government products, as they are supported with cheap or subsidized raw materials. The quasi-governmental apparatus would intervene in the economy and its activities, whether by cooperatives or companies supervised by the religious establishment or associated with the Revolutionary Guards.

The first Iranian Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri said, "no one can claim that there should be a free economy in a state under war."<sup>(32)</sup> If Jahangiri's concept of "war" is linked to US economic sanctions as a justification for marginalizing a free economy, then one can say Iran is in a state of war since the beginning of the revolution, without mentioning Iran's involvement in the war directly or by proxy.

The government will increase restrictions on imports and the possession of foreign currency as a tool for its resistance economic strategy. In June, the Iranian government banned the importation of 1,300 items, such as electrical appliances, textiles, shoes, leather goods, furniture, and more.<sup>(33)</sup> Last April, it imposed a restriction on the possession of foreign currency of more than 10,000 euros. But the important question is whether this ban will prevent the entry of goods by smuggling?

The idea of supporting the resistance economy, particularly oil trade, has been presented so that private sector oil can be sold by whatever method appropriate to ease the impact of US sanction on the oil sector.<sup>(34)</sup> This idea is supported by many, but, at the same time, it is rejected by others as they believe it will give the chance for new opportunistic brokers such as Babak Zanjani.<sup>(35)</sup> As result, the state treasury will be bloated with funds from the black market, as well as intermediaries selling oil to neighboring countries by smuggling which, indeed, has been done with Syrian and Iraqi oil by ISIS.<sup>(36)</sup>

Iran puts forth the idea of swapping oil with commodities from abroad, which might include strategic food commodities, raw materials for industry, industrial machinery, and equipment, while officials seek a fine deal for such trade agreements. Previously, Iran has two past experiences with Russia in this regard, but they initially failed in 2014 and 2017. The volume of trade between both countries is weak compared to Iran's trade with other countries such as China and Europe.

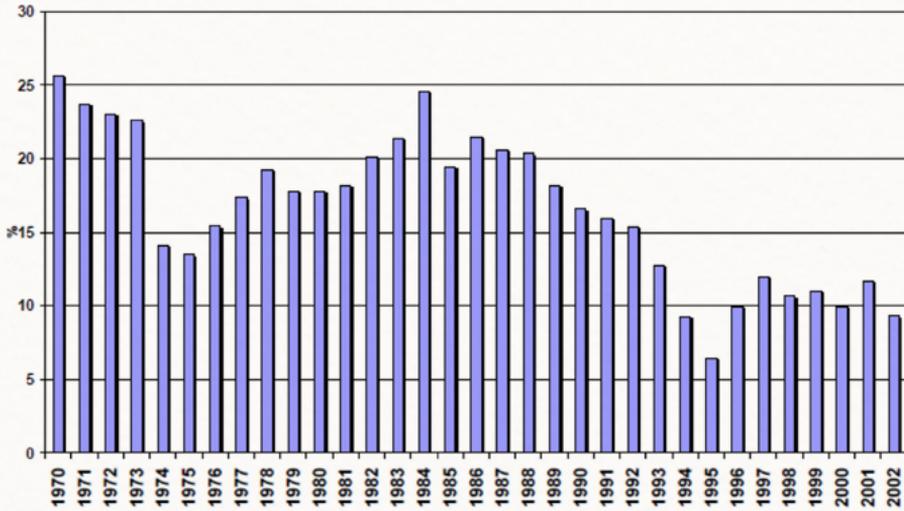
### **The challenges in implementing the theory of the resistant economy in Iran**

The smuggling of goods, the spread of corruption and the poor conditions of the means of production can put a spanner in the work for implementing the theory of the resistant economy.

**First:** The Iranian researcher Mohammad Farzanegan carried out research over a 32-year period and concluded that smuggling is historical in Iran and it lasted throughout the study period. The relative volume of smuggling ranged from 6% to 25% of the total trade in nearly 30 years. The increasing rate of smuggling has also been linked to unemployment rates at home, leading to more illegal actions.

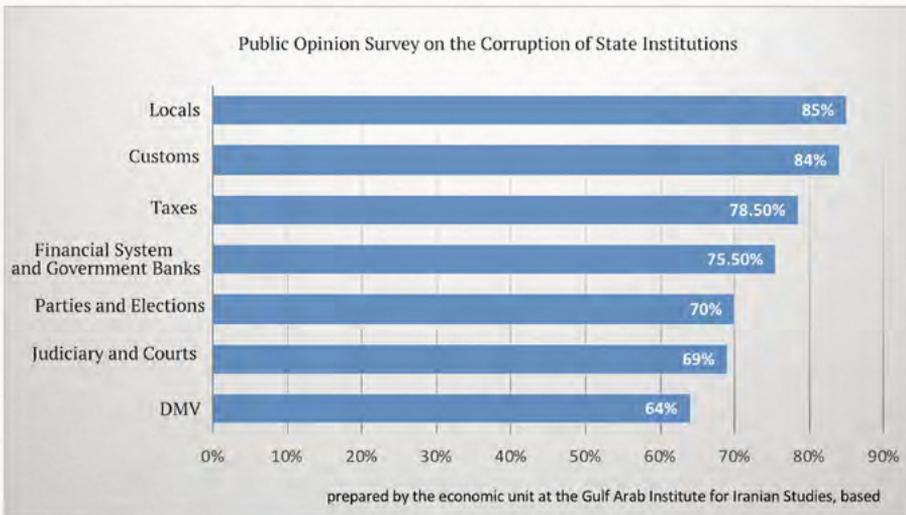
An Iranian parliamentarian, Mohammad Mahdi Zahedi, said, "We have annual seizures of smuggled goods in the country which are estimated at more than \$ 20 billion, but what the government seized was \$ 12 billion."<sup>(37)</sup>

Trafficking rate of Total Trade in Iran (2002-1970)



Source: Economic Research Forum, Working Paper 409, Egypt, 2008.

**Second:** Smuggling is linked to several reasons such as the abuse of power, the influence, and the frequency of corruption, which has become a phenomenon. Iranian elites warn of the consequences of corruption because it drains the finances of the country. Most recently, there was a major fraud case estimated at \$ 2.9 billion committed by an informal financial institution called “Thamin Hojaj.”<sup>(38)</sup> A field research carried out by an inspection agency in Isfahan showed that more than 50% of Isfahan residents believed that corruption in Iran has become more like a habit, and nearly 68% reported that it is difficult to detect corruption in the country.<sup>(39)</sup>



**Third:** Although Iran has its domestic and industrial means of production, it can be not disconnected from the outside world as it requires raw materials, intermediate products, spare parts and modern technology; evidently 2012 to 2015 GDP growth deteriorated, and thousands of industrial enterprises stopped operating. In other words, the shortage of production inputs and the poor condition of Iran's means of production undermine the implementation of the resistance economy strategy.

### **The future of the resistance economy strategy**

Iran's economy cannot afford to face more economic challenges. The strategy of the resistance economy would possibly thrive most successfully under a policy of self-sufficiency for most production inputs. However, this does not apply to a country in the twenty-first century and contradicts main economic principles such as specialization and the division of labor. North Korea's economic model may implement this theory, but this led to ignominious results, vast economic challenges and hardships.

President Rouhani's anti-smuggling measures were fruitless. The smuggling network in Iran is strong and complex supported by people who are professional in dealing with smuggling countermeasures. The government's measures against imports will increase smuggling. Therefore, it will undermine the government's support of local products because of competition from cheaper or high-quality smuggled alternative. The government can limit smuggling if it devised a new mechanism to counter it along its border with 13 countries and re-examined the supervisory role of the Revolutionary at the border crossing points. However, the government is unable to take these necessary measures.

### **Second: Various sectorial developments in a month**

The public and parliamentary demands escalated to change the government's economic team because US sanctions post-nuclear deal withdrawal came into force in August. This coincided with an economic downturn, a fall in purchasing power, currency depreciation, a hike in gold prices, inflation and a deterioration of living conditions. These developments resulted in the governor of the Central Bank of Iran being changed, who was in charge of monetary policy and tasked to stop local currency depreciation against the dollar and other foreign currencies. The governor decided that foreign currency gained from the sale of oil would be allocated to the provision of basic and public goods.<sup>(40)</sup> In this context, Iran asked Europe to transfer 300 million euros in cash to Tehran via a plane, according to Bild Germany Newspaper.<sup>(41)</sup>

Gradually Iran's oil exports decreased in recent months from 2.58 million barrels in April and 2.38 million barrels in May to 1.93 million barrels now. The US government's pressure has negatively affected Iran's oil exports for this month. In realizing this, US officials declared that they will work hard to marginalize Iran's oil exports in the world market, with the aim to drop it to zero with its allies by November. Consequently, South Korea, Japan, and India decided to reduce their imports of Iranian oil and may reach zero in November unless it gets US exemptions.<sup>(42)</sup>

According to a parliamentary Energy Committee member "Jalal Mirzai", some countries have removed themselves from purchasing Iranian oil or they hesitate to, such as South Korea. Some Indian refineries seek to find alternatives in other countries. This motivates the Iranian government to make offers to prevent its imports from being halted, such as insurance services for Indian oil tankers.<sup>(43)</sup>

To avoid US sanctions, a new list of international companies decided to exit the Iranian market during July, such as the French shipping company "CMCGM", the third largest shipping company in the world, in addition to some companies and global banks such as

Mitsubishi Bank (UFJ), one of Japan's largest banks. Similarly, Renault announced that it will likely leave the Iranian market and looks for alternatives in the African market.

Furthermore, Austrian Airlines announced that it will suspend flights to some Iranian cities next September, according to its website and the Dutch Air Company also declared on its website that it will halt its direct flights from the Netherlands to Iran and vice versa from 22 September.<sup>(44)</sup> In the same context, the US Treasury Department banned Mahan Travel and Tourism CO, which operates in the Malaysian capital, because it is associated with Mahan Air the blacklisted agency.<sup>(45)</sup>

The Iranian companies in Turkey increased, as well as, in real estate during the first half of 2018, around 944 units, more than three times the same period last year, according to the Turkish Statistics Agency. This reflects Iran's feeling towards the future of its economy because of a drop in the value of the local currency and its purchasing power.<sup>(46)</sup>

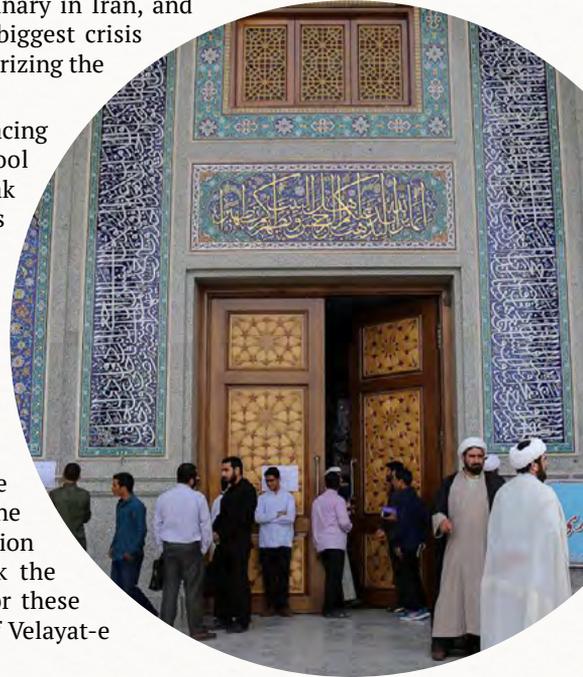
Prominently, US sanction negatively affected Iran's economy especially its oil sector because its oil exports went down in June, in the light of several countries' minimizing oil imports from Iran unless they get US exemptions. On the other hand, Iran threatened the passage of oil tankers through the Strait of Hormuz. In addition, the Iranian arena witnessed several developments such as international companies withdrawing from its markets, Iranian investment peaking in the Turkish real estate market, growing calls for the resistance economy and the governor of the Central Bank being changed, as well as demonstrations because of Iran's currency losing its value against the dollar.

## IDEOLOGICAL FILE

### First: Secularization of the seminary: transformation in Iranian religious attitudes

According to sources familiar with the seminary in Iran, and the elites in charge of politics in Iran, the biggest crisis facing the Iranian religious seminary is secularizing the seminary and society in Iran.

As to the seminary, many voices are now embracing 'original Shiism' represented in the school of waiting for the Imam. They openly speak out against the Velayat-e Faqih theory. This noticeable and gradual shift concerns the pro-regime clerics and philosophers. This worry could be seen clearly in the speech of Ebrahim Raisi, the Chairman of the Astan Quds Razavi foundation, given this month. He addressed senior clerics within the seminary in the provinces of Qom, Khorasan, Tehran, and Isfahan. During the speech, Raisi raised the issue of secularism, which threatens the seminary, at the time being. He also said that the seminaries were the incubators of the revolution from the beginning. And they should back the revolution, as the criteria of moderation, for these seminaries, is how far they follow the line of Velayat-e Faqih.<sup>(47)</sup>



Also, Ayatollah Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi warned of secularizing the seminary through the erosion of the Velayat-e Faqih theory. The theory is facing fierce opposition from within the seminaries. He asserted that within the seminaries and among several top officials there is opposition to the Velayat-e Faqih theory. Some seminaries want religion separated from politics while some officials tend to back 'the Iranian nationalism'. According to the cleric, some officials have reached the conviction that if the people vote to choose the president of the republic, so why is there a need to maintain the Supreme Leader's post? Why is there a need for Velayat-e Faqih? Do other nations have a Supreme Leader? The issue of opposing the theory of Velayat-e Faqih has spilled over into the seminaries. The cleric added that the Supreme Leader had the sensation that the revolutionary ideology was dying down in some arenas. He ordered clerics of the seminaries, and academics to be revolutionaries. If the Supreme Leader issues such a warning to the seminaries, this means that they are breaking with the ideology of the revolution. Yazdi noted that some officials are comfortably opposing the orders of the Supreme Leader. Despite their announced praise of his directives and orders, their actions suggest otherwise. Those officials seek to embrace nationalism in place of Velayat-e Faqih. Some officials replaced Islam with Iranian nationalism. This is the same slogan raised by the Shah; positive nationalism. It is about putting all the

divine and humanitarian values aside.<sup>(48)</sup>

If there are signs that the seminary is heading for secularization, with the voices opposed to Velayat-e Faqih getting bolder, despite the fact that these voices are not new to the arena, and the regime knows how to silence them by using its security tools, the regime can be said to be amplifying the presence of such voices to gain more legitimacy. The regime also seeks to mobilize its grassroots to rally behind its policies and distract attention from incessant failures on the political and economic arenas. Thus, the regime has employed secularism as an enemy to unite all forces to counter it.

When it comes to the Iranian society, the Iranian policymakers are cognizant of the fact that the Iranian youth has totally broken with the revolutionary ideology instilled by the Islamic revolution. They are getting close to Western modernity. They consider this a threat to the state and the regime's consolidation and stability. According to Iranian Attorney General Mohammad Jafar Montazeri, "The enemy has serious activities in the cyberspace so that Iran is filtering about 20,000 to 22, 000 subjects by the end of each week. But we find that the enemy resumes its activities under other names". He added, "Cyberspace is the source of much of the contents that defy morality and chastity". He also indicated the youths are in peril. And the enemy has massive plans and investments in this regard until it wipes out the sense of chastity.<sup>(49)</sup> In reality, the regime is concerned about the activities practiced on social media and the internet in general. These platforms helped the people take to the streets in 2009 and 2017 protests. A big deal of the regime's obsessions towards social secularism is the spread of Western political culture among the youth, which will help increase pressure on the regime as time passes.

## **Second: The ensuing debate on the hijab**

In recent months, Iran has witnessed heated debates on the hijab. Many officials expressed dissatisfaction at the style in which women wear hijab in Iran. In the meantime, pro-regime clerics called for obliging tourists to wear it to boost the sector and remove obstacles hindering it.

According to the cleric Mohsen Gharoian, who is a member of the conservative movement, tourists are not obliged, based on the orders of Sharia. "They can choose to wear hijab, but Sharia does not oblige them to do so," he said. Concerning what is being floated on the compulsory hijab code to be scrapped for the tourists who come to Iran in the free zone, he added that if the matter is tackled from a cultural perspective, people could accept it. As we travel to other nations and be treated based on our laws, we should allow tourists to be treated in our countries in accordance with their laws."<sup>(50)</sup>

In the same context, the Iranian Prosecutor General Mohammad Jafar Montazeri said - during a joint session of professors and activists from the scientific academies in the provinces of Khorasan, Qom, Tehran and Isfahan, held in the city of Mashhad - that the judicial handling of cultural subjects and the hijab does not help, and that peaceful methods should be adopted. He asserted that he is ready to back any effective plan to tackle the bad style of the hijab. He also noted some of those who defame the hijab said they do not believe in Islam and they are secularists or embracing other religions. But a few of them commit such acts against the hijab deliberately to defy the rules of Islam. The official also said if the security forces arrested<sup>(51)</sup> all those who defame the hijab, this would create a big problem for the regime and Islam, indicating that the educational and cultural institutions, clerics, schools, and universities are the ones to blame in the issue of the hijab. He also added that the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice, the security forces and the IRGC are taking measures aimed to prevent the hijab being defamed. Nevertheless, they should realize that dealing

harshly with those defaming the hijab will bring no positive results.<sup>(52)</sup> Perhaps the remarks of Mohammad Jafar Montazeri came months after women had defied the regime on the issue of the hijab in vain. The regime believed that arresting some women and prosecuting others would bring this issue to an end. But there were some tolerant statements calling for letting the women to protest. These remarks were made by the Chairman of the Women's Committee in the Iranian parliament Bruhan Salhshouri. She said, "As the hijab has become a law within the state, the method to object to it must be within the framework of law. But the issue has turned out to be totally personal. And it is unfair to jump to judgments about the girls protesting the hijab nor should we accuse them of corruption". She noted protesting the hijab started since the early years of imposing the compulsory hijab. And speaking out against hijab is not something new. And those protesting the hijab are not enemies of the regime, nor are they corrupt, nor spies. They are just opposing the hijab.<sup>(53)</sup>

Over the past months, Iran has witnessed waves of protests in the streets, and social media against the compulsory hijab. Several Iranian women have taken off the headscarf in the streets and posted their pictures on social media, protesting the authorities' abuse and harsh treatment of women for not wearing the hijab or wearing an indecent veil.<sup>(54)</sup>



### **Future vision: development and erosion of the Velayat-e Faqih Theory**

There is no doubt that openness to the world, the impact of globalization, the spread of Western values, satellite channels, the Internet and the media, as well as physical developments such as education, health and institutions, or, entering the era of modernity,<sup>(55)</sup> according to the reformist scholar Mojtahid al-Shabastari, has led to the role of religion declining in Iran. Life in the era of modernity is managed using experimental sciences, not jurisprudence or the sciences of Sharia alone. Thus, the role

of jurists and their domination, over religious and worldly affairs, has been curbed.

The Iranian regime may try to control the channels through which global and secular information flows from cyberspace by blocking and banning many websites. The regime is also continuing to arrest reformists, liberals and those affiliated with women's movements. All this reflects Iranian society's and its state's vulnerability to Western secularism. This also reflects the regime's failure to face secularism through effective rational tools, apart from the security and military ones. This means the regime could not consolidate any of the ideologies and theories it has been adopting, nor did it succeed in Islamizing sciences in Iranian schools, universities and other institutions, which have been eager for a cultural revolution since the 1980s. Therefore, the regime is still depending on security apparatuses to end any dispute that arises from ideological differences. If the regime does not see eye to eye with any opponent, intellectual, or elite figure, it resorts to arresting them.

These security measures cannot prevent the process of social transformation; it may slow it down and lead it to inch forward at a certain pace. However, there shall be in no way a stop to its growth, effectiveness, and attractiveness to the youth inside Iran. This asserts the point that the Khomeini-coined theory of Velayat-e Faqih is eroding in favor of secularism backed by the seminary, which is reverting to the theory of waiting. In this case, the civil state will be adopted as a rational option to get rid of the problematic theory of Velayat-e Faqih and the crises it brought to the Iranian state. Even in the case, the option will be Western secularism, the final solution in both cases will be the civil state, separating religion from politics, clerics' quitting politics and returning to the seminary. This will be imperative on all measures.

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أجهزة الدولة الطريق ولا تتعامل مع السيدات اللاتي لا يرتدين الحجاب؟ هل أصبحت الدعوات المناهضة للقرآن ولفريضة الأمر بالمعروف والنهي عن المنكر موجودة في البرلمان؟!“. موقع انتخاب: <https://bit.ly/2Jddp2H>

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ص 18



# ARAB AFFAIR

The Iranian expansion in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen has been swerving back and forth since President Trump took office in January 2017. He deeply realizes the necessity to curb Iran's influence in the Middle East and sees the serious dangers behind Iran's regional behavior, jeopardizing international and regional security. Iran is bringing the whole region to the brink of devastating wars and endless conflicts. The drums of war are pounding in the Middle East; a war between Israel and Iran is just around the corner. Iran continuously threatens to shut down the Strait of Hormuz; the most strategic sea gate in the Arabian Gulf and has made the region a fertile breeding ground for terrorism. Thus, the U.S. administration and the Arabian Gulf states work shoulder-to-shoulder to curtail Iran's regional influence for a durable peace in the Middle East.

### **First: Iran and Iraqi protests in Southern provinces**

To pinpoint the characteristics, trends, consequences, and the future of protests in any country, one should study thoroughly the "linked" issues. Based on a principle of politics, the analysis of protests is tackled as follows: locating the departure point (center-outskirts or vice versa); defining the geographical scope according to the demography of the protest areas; investigating the methods and tools applied by protestors; slogans; and motives (political, economic, or social); timing; internal and external conditions; inciters and parties involved whether at home or abroad; government response to protester demands; and in-depth analysis of future scenarios.

Protests of Basra sparked on July 7, 2018. They mushroomed into the South: Najaf, Maysan, Dhi Qar, Muthanna, Babylon, Karbala, Qadisiyah, and Baghdad.<sup>(1)</sup> The protests are still active until the moment of writing this report. The Southern governorates are highly significant for two main reasons: They are predominantly Shia; building a "Shiite backbone" or "Shiite enclaves;" which most of the Shiite leadership inside Iraq and Iran rely on to implement the sectarian project they aspire for. Second, they are oil-rich governorates, which have made Iraq the second largest oil producer in the world with a production capacity estimated at 4.8 million barrels per day.<sup>(2)</sup> Also, all oil tankers are docked in at Basra port for export worldwide. Basra, the economic capital of Iraq, dominates 59% of Iraq's oil reserves.<sup>(3)</sup>

The protesters' methods varied from closing access to Umm Qasr Port, the largest and strategic port in Iraq to storming airports like An-Najaf Airport;<sup>(4)</sup> they stood there preventing the departure of aircraft. The Ministry of Transportation resorted to sending all the aircraft from An-Najaf to other airports and scheduled road transport services for passengers.<sup>(5)</sup> Moreover, they circled around the reformist houses and provincial councils,<sup>(6)</sup> blocked 40 main roads linking Southern provinces, and stormed oil installations in Basra.<sup>(7)</sup> Other protesters broke into nine party headquarters in Basra, Dhi Qar, An-Najaf, and Karbala. They set fire to the headquarters of pro-Iran Shiite parties and militias such as the Islamic Dawa Party, Asa'ib Ahl Haq, Hezbollah Brigades,<sup>(8)</sup> Hadi Amiri's Fatah alliance,<sup>(9)</sup> and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq.<sup>(10)</sup> They chanted slogans against the rising unemployment rate, corruption, Iran's malignant influence, and sectarianism. They burned posters of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. At least, two were killed and 61 were injured.<sup>(11)</sup>

The slogans and demands of protesters mainly revolved around fighting corruption, solving the unemployment crisis, improve civic services, and being free from Iranian guardianship. When analyzing thoroughly the realities and factors of these protests, it becomes clear that Iran is behind all the crises rooted in Iraq. The protesters chanted against Iran and set fire to the headquarters of Iranian proxies which is a clear sign of Iran's involvement in the Iraqi crisis. The motives behind the Iraqi protests are as follows:

### • The spread of corruption and high unemployment:

Who is behind the high unemployment rate and exacerbating corruption in Iraq, which put Iraq in the top list of corrupt countries? Iraq is one of the world's leading oil producers, however, it suffers huge budget deficits; \$361-500 billion was leaked abroad.<sup>(12)</sup> Who is responsible for Iraq's dilemma? To answer these questions, we should go back to Iraq's historic turning point; the American invasion in 2003. Reviewing Iraq's situation back then unveils that corruption surfaced prominently when Iran started spreading its influence across Iraq.

To infiltrate government bodies in Iraq and achieve its ultimate ends, Iran isolated Iraqi patriotic figures and supported its allies who were recruited to implement its expansionist project. The people of Basra have become depressed and oppressed suffering harsh living conditions, though they live in the wealthiest city in Iraq; home to over 65% of Iraq's oil production.<sup>(13)</sup> Iran has tightened its grip over the Iraqi government since 2003, so it is responsible for the devastating economic downturns Iraq has been suffering. The latest protesters in Basra rose against the foreign oil firms, which only hire non-Iraqis.<sup>(14)</sup>

Fighting corruption in Iraq starts first with fighting political corruption; a generator of financial and administrative corruption. Uprooting Iranian militias, particularly the PMF, which is deeply entrenched with arms and an ultimate force is the most difficult mission Iraq has to carry out in fighting corruption.

### • Social services crisis

Who is behind the water and power crisis that incited people to protest in most of the Southern governorates? Iran stopped exporting electricity to Iraq during the summer season; Iraq soared to 122 degrees (50C). Iraq had been importing around 1200 MW to make up its 7.500 MW deficit, the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity reported.<sup>(15)</sup> Iraq produces only 15.700 MW daily while it consumes 23.000 MW daily. The power deficit affected mainly three governorates: Basra, Maysan, Dhi Qar.<sup>(16)</sup> Iran claimed that the halt in electricity exports was overpayment issues and because Iran faced a poor rainfall, which eventually led to a fall in power generation.<sup>(17)</sup> Iraq must pay \$1 billion to Iran for electricity, according to some statistics. Iranian officials said that their country does not have excess electricity to be exported to Iraq confirming, "if Iran had electricity exceeding domestic consumption, it would rather export it to Iraq to avert protests against Iran in Shiite cities."<sup>(18)</sup> President Rouhani's Chief of staff Mahmoud Vaezi said Iran exported electricity to Iran only if it had had an excess of electric fluid."<sup>(19)</sup>

Drinking water crisis: Iran denied blocking the flow of the Little Zab River, a primary stream of the Euphrates itself. Iraq's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ahmed Mahjoub confirmed Iran blocking the flow of Little Zab— that exacerbated concurrently the water crisis with the continuous power outage.<sup>(20)</sup>

### • Iranian incursion into Iraq

The protesters chanted slogans against Iran and set fire to the offices and headquarters of Iraqi parties allied with Iran. Since 2003, Iran exerted all efforts possible to get a firm grip on the Iraqi government and decision-making circles at home and abroad,





smoothing the path for its sectarian-expansionist project. After recruiting Iraqi fighters, Iran established and armed Shiite militias, which exceeded 50 groups in 2018. To legitimize – nationally and internationally- the PMF presence inside Iraq, Iran had been pressuring the Iraqi government to merge the PMF militias in the Iraqi Army, before the end of 2017.

On the economic level, Iraq remained Iran’s number one trading partner. On the political level, Iran placed further pressure on Muqtada Sadr, the leader of Shia Sadrists, through its top leading proponent Hadi Amiri by forging a ‘grand’ coalition that shapes the new Iraqi government and saves the reaped gains in Iraq—ensuring Iraq will remain dependent on Iran. The Iraqi people voted for the cross-sectarian national bloc, *Sa’eroun*. Apparently, the Iraqi people have realized the dangers behind the Iranian influence in their country. They expressed their rage and anger – from the heart of Shiite enclaves in Southern Iraq—against Iran’s interventions, aspiring to return to the Arab sphere. Two months passed since the Iraqi parliamentary elections, the government has not been formed yet.<sup>(21)</sup>

Iran justifies its interventions in Iraq under two pretexts: advisory services, officially requested by the Iraqi and Syrian governments; to counter-terrorism and support the oppressed. Ahmad Jannati the Secretary of the Guardian Council of the Constitution (GCC) stressed the necessity of his country presence in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon to protect Iran from ISIS, or else the Iranian people would face the agony that the Syrians and Iraqis have suffered from this terrorist group. He added, “Iran responded to the calls of the oppressed all over the world. Iran did not have any interest. If Iran was not there; in Syria and Iraq, our country would be in danger.”<sup>(22)</sup>

The protests rose when forming the Iraqi government was hindered by the disagreement between Sadrists and pro-Iranian coalition. Sadr proposed to appoint his cousin Jafar Sadr as prime minister, but Fatah, Nasr, State of Law and Hikma were against his appointment.<sup>(23)</sup> Forming the new Iraq government is torn between two blocs: one fights to protect and save Iranian interests and influence while the other fights to revive Iraqi nationalism and Arabism, reaffirming its attachment to Iraq’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

It is worth to mention here that the protests were also triggered by the threats of President Rouhani during his visit to Switzerland, and Commander of the IRGC Mohammad Ali Jafari to close the Strait of Hormuz in response to U.S. sanctions against its oil exports. Qassem Soleimani, Commander of Quds Force praised President Rouhani’s threats. In response, the U.S Central Head Command announced that the U.S. Navy is “ready to ensure the freedom of navigation and the free flow of commerce wherever international law allows.”<sup>(24)</sup>

Looking for a way out: The outgoing Prime Minister Haider Abadi visited Basra to address the crisis and listen to the protesters’ demands.<sup>(25)</sup> Immediately, he held an urgent meeting in Baghdad to meet the protesters’ demands, as well as he allocated 3.5 trillion Iraqi dinars to embark on a desalination project to address the water crisis and upgrade the electricity network to increase power generation.<sup>(26)</sup>

He ordered the Ministry of Interior to send 10,000 soldiers to maintain security in the



Southern cities.<sup>(27)</sup> The Iraqi Minister of Electricity Qasim Fahdawi traveled to Iran to meet his counterpart Reza Ardakanian to discuss re-exporting electricity to Iraq. However, his visit was fruitless.<sup>(28)</sup> As a result, Abadi sent Fahdawi and the Iraqi Planning Minister Salman Jumaili to Saudi Arabia to sign a Memorandum of Understanding for energy cooperation to meet Iraq's energy demands.

<sup>(29)</sup> Some Iranian commenters said that Saudi-Iraqi rapprochement will affect Iranian influence inside Iraq and indeed will pave the way for Saudi Arabia to enter Iraq.<sup>(30)</sup> The infrastructure needed to deliver electricity from Saudi Arabia is not ready yet, which delayed the agreement to enter into force.<sup>(31)</sup>

Amid the continuous protests over the power blackouts and the Ministry's failure to meet the people's demands- despite the allocations handed to the Ministry to address the crisis- Abadi dismissed the electricity minister.<sup>(32)</sup>

The above facts unfold that Iran has dominated the backbone of Iraqi statehood and worsened the living conditions of the Iraqi people. It further entrenched its political and military presence by supporting its proxy parties, which eventually thwarted the reform efforts of Iraqi nationalists.

The recent protests across Southern Iraq show that huge streams of Iraqi people-including Shiites who voted for Sa'eroun-deeply realize the serious dangers behind Iran's incursion into their country. The Iraqi Shiites seek independence from Iran's sphere of influence through diminishing Iranian proxies deeply rooted in Iraq. Hope for real reform is rising; the Iraqis have identified the corruption loopholes since Iran's dominance of the Iraqi state post-2003.

Etemad, the reformist Iranian newspaper, published an editorial confirming that "the Iraqi people's attitude to Iran has started to change; they now have a negative view of the Iranian role in Iraq. Protesters in Southern Iraq- where most of Shiites live- chanted slogans and expressed their rage against Iran." The editorial indicated that considerable public resentment emerged from Iranian failure to complete infrastructure projects by turning a blind eye to the acute needs and demands of the Iraqi people. On the other hand, the Iraqis see how China and Turkey funded reconstruction projects targeting social, education, and health development in Southern Iraq- through Turkey and China seek apparently to use these projects as a means of soft power to entrench their presence in Southern Iraq. They also linked the wrong policies of the former Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Maliki to Iran's influence in Iraq.<sup>(33)</sup> The Iraqi people in Southern Iraq have profoundly comprehended that the Iraqi regime serves Iranian interests and not theirs.

Iran received the first blow in Iraq when the Iraqi people voted for Sa'eroun. The second stronger blow hit Iran was the massive protests in southern Iraq. The protests rose from Shiite enclaves against Iran. The Shia religious authority -known as *Marja'yya* in An-Najaf, already in conflict with Iran's Qom *Marja'yya* for trying to pull the rug from under its feet – supported the protester's demands.<sup>(34)</sup> The protesters expressed



their frustration over Iranian incursion into their country and targeted the pro-Iranian political parties. They burned down the PMF party offices; as well as those of Asa'ib Ahl Haq and Iraqi Hezbollah.

The turbulence Iran now faces gives more room to the Arabian Gulf states for real rapprochement with Iraq. Iran has already failed to solve the power and water crises in Iraq. The negotiations between the two countries hit a dead end. But Saudi Arabia has already stepped in to help Iraq pass the crisis and break free from Iran's firm grip. We expect other Arabian Gulf states to follow the Saudi lead in this cause.

## **Second: Iran's incursion in Syria amid regional and international movements**

### **1. Iran's insistence on maintaining its military presence in Syria**

Syria is a very integral part in Iran's corridor to the Mediterranean Sea, through which arms are safely delivered to Hezbollah in Lebanon and to other Iranian proxies in the region. This corridor, which secures Iran's military presence in Southern Syria, is a very strong bargaining chip as it falls within the ambit of Israel's security. Through this corridor, Iran managed to fuel Syria with military and non-military fighters recruited from Iraq, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and from politically unstable countries. Those combatants fought shoulder to shoulder with Assad's forces in all battles since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis.

Iran justifies its military presence in Syria under the pretense of "supporting the oppressed;" "offering military consultancy;" "responding to official requests by the Syrian regime;" and achieving legitimate goals such as counter-terrorism and safeguarding national security. Hossein Amir Abdollahian, a senior foreign policy advisor to the Iranian parliamentary speaker, said "the presence of Iran's military advisers in Syria is within the framework of the Tehran-Damascus relations and nobody can intervene in this matter."<sup>(55)</sup> Abdollahian reaffirmed that Iran's military advisor will stay in Syria for counter-terrorism.<sup>(56)</sup> We review the main aspects of Iran's heavy influence in Syria as follows:

#### **• Military engagement in Southern Syrian battles**

Despite Russian promises – for the United States, Jordan and Israel- not to let Iranian militias participate in Assad's military operations, the military exercises and preparations to overrun Daraa and Quneitra near the Israeli and Jordanian borders exposed the level of involvement of Iranian militias such as Zainab Brigade, Fatimiyoun Brigade, Lebanon's Hezbollah, and Iraq's Zol Fiqar Brigade. The target behind the

invasion was to clear Daraa and Quneitra from anti-Assad forces and expand the regime's influence in Syria.

Footage of Iranian militia fighters celebrating the takeover of Northern Dara spread like wildfire in social media. Anti-Assad forces accepted the Jordanian proposal to hand heavy arms to Assad's regime and evacuate Daraa, so they would get a safe exit to Northern Syria.<sup>(37)</sup> A massive explosion ripped apart an Iranian ammunition depot used by Iranian militias in Daraa, reported *Yediot Aharonot*.<sup>(38)</sup> Iranian militia fighters were wearing the uniform of Assad's forces to cover up their presence, according to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.<sup>(39)</sup>

Assad's opponents had nothing but to accept the Jordanian proposal. They cannot confront the heavily-armed Iranian militias and Assad's forces, backed by Russian air support. The looming threat of smuggling fighters into Jordan and hosting more non-organized displaced Syrians resulted in Jordan placing further pressure on opponents to accept the deal. The opponents stood powerless in front of the Iranian-Russian-Syrian military coalition. They realized the battle of Aleppo killed thousands of people and left others homeless and injured. They know this will be repeated in Daraa if fighting continued.<sup>(40)</sup>

On the other hand, Israel deterred the military incursion of Assad's forces by highlighting the consequences of breaking the Syrian-Israeli Disengagement Agreement signed in 1947, in which both parties decided to maintain a ceasefire in the buffer zone. Israel will not allow the Syrian army to use artillery and other heavy weapons in the buffer area. Assad's and Iran's forces halted their military incursion into Southern Daraa, hedging against an expected Israeli backlash. Eventually, they accepted the Jordanian proposal.<sup>(41)</sup> Needless to say, Russia pressured Assad to stop advancing towards West Daraa while preparing for the U.S.-Russia Summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Helsinki on July 16, 2018. Thereafter, the Syrian regime was forced to sign an agreement with the opponent forces based on the Jordanian proposal. After three years of closure because of the control by anti-Assad forces, the Syrian regime seized an excellent opportunity to re-take the strategic Nassib crossing, a major gateway for Syrian-Jordanian exports.<sup>(42)</sup>

Eyal Zisser, an expert on Syria at Tel Aviv University, said that Israel fell into a trap once the Syrian regime took over Southern Syria. Assad's forces would not control it without Iranian military support, considering 20% of pro-Assad' forces are Syrian while the rest



are Iranian proxies.<sup>(43)</sup> Iran can easily creep Southward to the Israeli border. Israel called many times to expel pro-Iranian fighters from Syria. The Israeli army said on July 7, 2018, that Iran's and Hezbollah's fighters, wearing civilian clothes, were residing among 15,000 refugees in the Briqa camp, near the Israeli-held Golan Heights.<sup>(44)</sup> Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said, "Iran's presence in Syria is legitimate," adding, "no one can expel Iran neither from the border region nor from Syria. They did not spend tens of billions of dollars and sacrifice thousands of fighters to leave Syria at Israel's request."<sup>(45)</sup>

Following the deal, anti-Assad rebels began evacuating from the two towns to a small territory in Northern Idlib and the Golan Heights. Assad's regime took over the two towns along with the most strategic cities stretching from Damascus, through Rif Dimashq to Tartus and Latakia, i.e., the Assad regime successfully managed to re-take control over vast territories from Southern Syria towards the entire Mediterranean coastal region. The Assad regime may regain control over the Golan Heights' territory now held by the rebels. It would probably sign a similar deal with the rebels through threatening the use of force to make them hand over their weapons and evacuate the territories. Israel prefers these territories to be under the control of Assad's forces rather than the rebels.<sup>(46)</sup> Over forty years, the Syrian regime-maintained a ceasefire and complete security in the Golan Heights.<sup>(47)</sup>

#### • Velayati visiting Moscow before the Helsinki Summit

Ali Akbar Velayati, the international affairs adviser to Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, visited Moscow on July 12 to deliver a message from Khamenei and President Rouhani to Putin in regards to the Israeli request to expel Iranian militias from Syria and U.S. sanctions against Iran.<sup>(48)</sup> Velayati confirmed that Putin stressed on the importance of Russia-Iran cooperation in Syria to support the Assad regime, adding that Putin reviewed statistics showing how the total trade volume between the two countries bounced to 36% within the first four months in 2018. The two major Russian oil companies; Rosneft and Gazprom started talks with Iran's Oil Ministry to sign deals worth up \$10 billion, he added. Velayati reaffirmed that the Russian statistics show that Moscow is ready to invest \$50 billion in Iranian oil and gas to replace the European firms that left Iran after the U.S. pull out of the nuclear deal in May 2018.<sup>(49)</sup>

The Iranian writer Mostafa Aghani said that Iran's growing concerns over the possibility of a trilateral agreement between the United States, Russia, and Israel to expel the Iranian army and militias from Syria made Velayati travel to Moscow four days before the Helsinki Summit. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with Putin on July 12, 2018, for the same reason; pullback Iranian militias from Syria. The international media reported that the three countries discussed a deal to expel Iranian militias from Syria.<sup>(50)</sup>

#### • Evidence of Iran sending fighters to Syria

Repeatedly, Iranian officials claim that they only send military advisors to Syria, denying the recruitment and deployment of fighters. There is a big difference between these two meanings. A military advisor offers consultancy while a fighter engages in combat in the battlefield. How an advisor, giving military advise, is killed in the battlefield holding a weapon is something Iran must answer for. Mohammad Ibrahim Rashidi, an IRGC explosive expert in the Mechanized Division, was killed in Syria.<sup>(51)</sup>

## 2. Influence of Iran's role in Syria

### • Trump-Putin Summit on Syria:

The Iranian incursion in Syria was a top issue at the Helsinki Summit. Putin concluded that the Syrian regime must stick to the ceasefire agreement in the Golan Heights signed

in 1974. And Trump emphasized Iranian militias must be expelled from Syria.<sup>(52)</sup>

Some Israeli media outlets reported that the Summit did not serve Israeli interests because its conclusion did not include “the expulsion of Iranian forces and militias from Syria,” indicating it is was just a meeting between Trump and Putin. They neglected Israeli and Jordanian security concerns and the issue of Syrian opponents and the Kurds, giving a green light to the Russians to break down all the security protocols that Israel had settled with Jordan. The Russia and Syria launched, on June 28, 342 airstrikes against Anti-Assad forces near the Israeli-Jordanian border. 229 (87%) airstrikes by the Russian air force and 43 (13%) by the Syrian air force.<sup>(53)</sup>

Ron Ben Yishai, Yedioth’s military analyst, said that the Summit did not come with something new, stressing, “Iranians are staying in Syria.” He added that the conclusion of the Summit allowed Assad to deploy his forces across Southern Syria and on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights. Moreover, Putin kept silent about Iran’s influence in Syria while Trump could not make a deal with Putin to expel Iranian forces from Syria.<sup>(54)</sup>

Probably Yishai’s opinion reflects the reality; Abdollahian said, “neither the Americans nor the Russians or any other power can make a decision to expel Iran’s military advisors from Syria... we told the Russian officials and all of those talking about [our] military advisors in Syria that only Tehran and Damascus can make a decision in this regards. We will stay to support Syria in counterterrorism and achieve peace and security across Syria.”<sup>(55)</sup>

#### • Israeli insistence to expel Iranian militias from Syria

##### - Netanyahu traveled to Moscow and refused Russia’s proposal:

On July 12, Netanyahu traveled to Moscow to discuss with Putin the future of Iranian militias in Syria. He rejected a Russian proposal to pull back Iranian militias 80 km away from Israel’s border and called on to expel all Iranian militias from Syria. But Putin refused this saying, “that is not possible, no one can force Iranians and Syrians to do so.”<sup>(56)</sup> He also called for the closure of the border crossing between Syria and Lebanon and between Syria and Iraq through which Iranian arms are smuggled to Hezbollah.<sup>(57)</sup> He also said that he supports Assad in maintaining security in Southern Syria if Iranian militias are expelled from Syria. “We haven’t had a problem with the Assad regime, for 40 years not a single bullet was fired on the Golan Heights.”<sup>(58)</sup>

Israeli military sources reported that the IRGC began – two days before the Trump-Putin meeting- “transferring military convoys from Western Iraq to Eastern Syria,” through the Iraqi-Syrian border. The convoys passed through Bokamal city to fill up their vehicles, the headquarters of pro-Iran Shiite militias and the place where Qassem Soleimani resides when visiting Syria. The sources reported that they monitored “Division no. 313”. This unit is composed entirely of Shiite militias under the command of officers of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. This brigade took part in the battles in Daraa and was transferred this week to Quneitra. Quneitra Hawks - a force of several hundred Hezbollah commandos attached to the Seventh Division of the Syrian Army. The sources said, “if the Russians cannot or do not want to remove these forces from the border areas with Israel, how do they expect Israel to accept their promise to ensure the withdrawal of Iranian forces within 100 kilometers of Israel’s borders?”<sup>(59)</sup>

The security website, Debka’s sources reported that the talks between Putin and Netanyahu and between Israeli Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman and his Russian counterpart Sergey Shoygu along with the U.S.-Israeli talks reached a dead end. That means there is no agreement yet between Israel and Russia on Iran’s military presence in the Golan Heights.<sup>(60)</sup>

Reza Mir Taher, an Iranian journalist, justified the Russian position that thwarted the Israeli request to expel Iranian militias from Syria claiming that Russia has a navy base and airbase but has a limited number of ground units. Therefore, Russia is in need for Iranian ground forces to protect its military bases. “The Russians know that the Iranian presence in Syria is not only necessary but also vital,” he added.<sup>(61)</sup>

Reza Sadr Husseini, an Iranian writer, assumed that Iran refused the Israeli call to leave Syria because its military presence in Syria is bound to its national security. He said, “the absence of Iranian military in Syria would jeopardize national security,” pointing to the ISIS attack against Khomeini’s shrine in 2017. “Because of this we stretched our security boundaries beyond our national borders,” he added. He continued “Syria has been always Iran’s best ally against Israel and the United States, as well as the Iranian people, believe that their frontlines in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon hinders Israel from targeting their national security. If Iran’s allies neighboring Israel were weak, Israel would be surrounding Iran”.<sup>(62)</sup>

#### **- The Israeli consecutive military strikes against Iranian militia:**

In an attempt to push the deployed Iranian militia out of Syria. On 8 July 2018, the Israeli Air Force launched a second military strike in the East of Syria targeting Iranian backed militia and it was aware of the existence of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard there. This surely crossed its calculations after the first air strike since the last one four months ago.<sup>(63)</sup> A US security source reported that Israel has intensified its air raids in Syria to thwart Iranian attempts to launch a road to transfer weapons from Iraq to Syria and Lebanon. Similarly, the Israel air strike targeted the headquarters of the Revolutionary Guard in a Syrian town near the Syrian-Iraqi border, which resulted in killing 22 Shiite militia fighters.<sup>(64)</sup> In the meantime, the official Syrian news agency stated on 22 July 2018 that Israel targeted a scientific research center in Masyaf near Hama because of Iranian presence over there.<sup>(65)</sup>

#### **Third: The area of influence and control**

By the efforts of the Arab coalition forces under the leadership of Saudi Arabia, the Yemeni National Army has advanced successfully at different fronts and restored many strategic areas such as Hodeidah and Nahum near Sana’a and Taiz. Under those circumstances, the Houthis have abandoned many of their sites leaving behind weapons



and equipment which has reduced their area of control and influence, however, they have continued to target populated areas in Saudi Arabia with ballistic missiles as well as attacking two Saudi oil tankers in the Red Sea. The Houthis' activities have violated many international resolutions that prohibit such military operations.

### 1. The geographical progress of the legitimate forces:

- The geographical deployment: The legitimate forces successful military operations were a heavy blow against the Iranian –backed Houthis on several fronts such as taking over new positions in the governorates of Taiz, Nahm and Saada after restoring its airport in June 2018. The Yemeni forces with Arab coalition air cover seek to liberate the strategic port of Hodeidah, cutting off Iran's support to the Houthis, and the smuggling of weapons, antiquities, and drugs which is carried out by Iran's militias.<sup>(66)</sup> The Yemeni Army and Popular Resistance Forces confronted several attacks and infiltration attempts by the Houthis against their bases at Tahitha and Durahmi districts South of Hodeidah province On July 1, 2018. Consequently, the Houthi militia suffered heavy casualties, the capture of more than 30 fighters, and the besieging of Mughras and Suwaiq South of Hodeidah.<sup>(67)</sup> The latter military move was to liberate Hodeidah from the grip of the Houthis since their takeover in 2014. On July 3, 2018, the National Army launched an attack under the leadership of the Commander of the Seventh Military Zone against several sites where the Houthis were stationed in Nahm. They, therefore, managed to liberate several sites such as Shohda'a, Rabah, and others.<sup>(68)</sup> After fierce battles against the Houthis, the National Army forces liberated various areas in the Heifan district South of Taiz. They were also able to restore Karab mountain to Khair, Mamshah mountain in Sabd valley, Bani Ali market in Aabous, and Tabh Said Taha by carrying out a surprise attack against the Houthis positions.<sup>(69)</sup> West of Taiz in the district of Waze'a witnessed a slow advance by the National Army. Meanwhile, they controlled the mountains of Hinaa and Gail at the Kadha fronts, on the outskirts of the district, together with seizing weapons and ammunition.<sup>(70)</sup> Furthermore, significant progress has been made in the Sa'ada governorate, on July 5, 2018, the National Army moved towards the center of Baqam district, in a well-planned operation to control important mountain ranges and cut off the supply line. The forces were able to control the Mezher mountain ranges and the village of Mezher overlooking the center of the governorate from the East. The forces were spread over more than five kilometers of deployment.<sup>(71)</sup>

- Reducing the area under the Houthi's control: The Houthi leader Abdulmalik Houthi has declared that he is ready to hand over the main port of Hodeidah to the United Nations if pro-government forces backed by the Saudi-led coalition stop its offensive attack.<sup>(72)</sup> On July 23, 2018, Sky News Arabia published photographs from inside the city of Hodeidah, showing the city as a "ghost town" after most of the Houthi fighters left toward Hajjah and Sanaa.<sup>(73)</sup>

### 2. Houthi militia violations:

- Targeting Saudi Arabia's territory with ballistic missiles: In a continuous and flagrant violation of UN resolutions (2216 and 2231) and in defiance of the international community by targeting populated areas and civilians, the Houthis fired several ballistic missiles into Saudi Arabia's territory which were intercepted by the Saudi Air Defense Forces. In this context, according to official statistics, the Colonel Turki Maliki stated that 163 rockets were launched against the Kingdom by the Houthi militias, and more than 66 thousand missiles landed in Saudi territory, since the beginning of the military operations in 2015.<sup>(74)</sup> The Houthi militia is going through consecutive defeats in several battlefields. The following table shows the ballistic missiles launched by the Houthis

towards the Kingdom's territory during July 2018:

Day and date	Time	Number of rockets	City	Results
Friday (July 6th)	7:17 pm	Ballistic missile	Jazan	No injury nor damaged
Tuesday (July 10th)	2:44 pm	Ballistic missile	Jazan	No injury nor damaged
Saturday (July 14th)	12:52 pm	Ballistic missile	Jazan	No injury nor damaged
Wednesday (July 18th)	10:15 am	Ballistic missile	Jazan	No injury nor damaged
Thursday (July 19th)	10:50 pm	Ballistic missile	Jazan	No injury nor damaged

• Targeting oil tankers: The Coalition Forces Spokesman, Colonel Turki Maliki, said that at 1:15 am on July 25, a Saudi oil tanker was attacked by the Houthis and Iran causing minor damage,<sup>(75)</sup> in international waters West of the Hodeidah port, which is under the Houthis grip. The coalition confirmed that the continuous threats posed by the Houthis would negatively affect world trade and the freedom of navigation in the Red Sea and they could have environmental consequences as well. These developments would also impact international navigation.<sup>(76)</sup> In fact, the Saudi Minister of Energy Khalid Falih said that his country would “temporarily suspend” all shipments of crude oil which passes through the Strait of Mandeb after two Saudi oil tankers were attacked earlier by the Houthis until the Bab Mandab Strait navigations become safe.<sup>(77)</sup>

## Endnotes

- (1) خراسان ص: 3/ اعتراضات معیشتی و ناآرامی های جنوب عراق به استان های دیگر نیز کشیده شد تعداد بازدید : 1477 بحرانی شاید خطرناک تر از داعش در عراق، <https://bit.ly/2JkXnDH>
- (2) وكالة أنباء فارس، رامین حسین‌آبادیان اعتراضات مسالمت‌آمیز در عراق و نقش آفرینی مجدد سعودی، <https://bit.ly/2mhFGMe>
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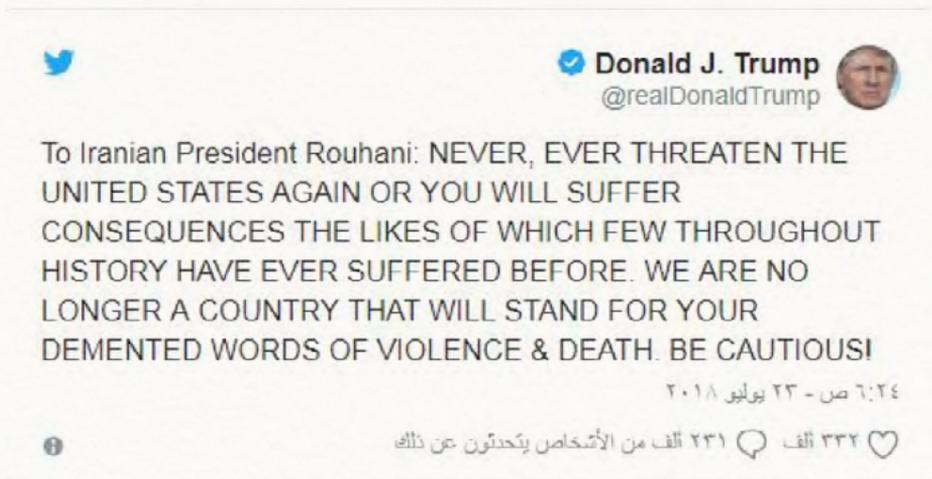
**US-Iran Relations: Mutual Threats  
and Intense Pressures**

In the month of July 2018, US-Iran relations witnessed an unprecedented escalation. US sanctions on Iran come into force on August 6, 2018, after its withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal on May 8, 2018.

### US-Iranian mutual threats

On August 6, 2018, the new US sanctions on Iran come into force. Due to the lack of solutions to resolve disagreements between both countries, leaders in both have launched a war of words on each other and threatened each other with the military card, especially after the Iranian President Hasan Rouhani's statement during his visit to Switzerland when he said, "If Iran will not be able to export oil, no other country in the region will be."<sup>(1)</sup> This statement by Rouhani was praised by Iran's officials, even by those who oppose his policies. The Quds Force Commander, Qassem Soleimani praised Rouhani and said that his forces were ready to take any action for the interest of the Iranian regime. Ismail Kowsari, Commander of the IRGC Sarollah base said that they would close the Straits of Hormuz to the world if necessary. The IRGC Commander, Mohammed Ali Ja'fari adopted the same posture saying, "In all cases, it is necessary that our enemies and others understand what the Strait of Hormuz means."<sup>(2)</sup> Finally, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei supported Rouhani in his statements, he said, "These are important statements and represent the regime's tendencies; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has to follow this position of the President of the republic."<sup>(3)</sup>

In response to Rouhani's statement, "The world's hostile policies towards Iran would lead to the mother of all wars,"<sup>(4)</sup> the US President, Donald Trump threatened to prevent Iran from exporting oil<sup>(5)</sup> and posted a statement on Twitter saying, "You will suffer consequences the likes of which few throughout history have ever suffered before; we are no longer a country that will stand for your demented words of violence and death; be cautious."<sup>(6)</sup>



The United States is likely to adopt brinkmanship towards Iran like the policy it adopted towards North Korea that resulted in resolving some disagreements between the two countries. This is evident through the statement of President Trump on the sidelines of the NATO Summit, "We will impose the toughest sanctions ever on Iran; Iran at some point will call me and ask for a deal, and we will make a deal."<sup>(7)</sup> In a press conference with the Italian Prime Minister on July 31, 2018, President Trump responded to a question



about if he was willing to meet with his Iranian counterpart, President Rouhani, saying, “I’ll meet with anybody; no preconditions; at any time they want.”<sup>(8)</sup> Hence, the door is open for direct negotiations between both sides, knowing that Iran has responded positively to President Trump’s offer, which means rapprochement and agreement is possible between the two countries.<sup>(9)</sup>

### **Intense US pressures on Iran**

Post US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, the first set of the new US sanctions on Iran come into force on August 6, 2018. These sanctions include sectors such as automobiles, trade, gold, and precious metals while the second t of sanctions start on November 6, 2018 targeting the energy, oil, and banking sectors.<sup>(10)</sup>

On the same issue, the US Department of Treasury announced that it would not give any waivers to anybody in this concern to reach an unprecedented level of pressure on Iran as President Trump has threatened. For example, the US government has refused to grant waivers to the Airbus company ATR to continue doing business with airline companies in Iran.<sup>(11)</sup>

The United States exerted pressure on the Iranian regime by supporting external and internal opposition. In a conference by Mujahedeen Khalq in Paris, some American public personalities represented the United States and supported public demonstrations in Iran for a peaceful regime change in this country.<sup>(12)</sup> In response, the Iranian permanent representative in the United Nations, Gholam Ali Khoshroo sent a letter to the Security Council asking international organizations to stop US support to the Mujahedeen Khalq.<sup>(13)</sup>

Internally, the United States has commenced a TV channel working around the clock in Farsi directed to the Iranian people to exert pressure on the Iranian regime and promote the positive image of the United States in Iran.<sup>(14)</sup> The United States has encouraged public demonstrations in this country. After his meeting with the Russian President, Vladimir Putin on July 16, 2018, President Trump said, “The United States supports demonstrators; the Iranian regime does not want Iranians to know that we support them.”<sup>(15)</sup>

In addition, according to Iranians, several accounts in Farsi belonging to the US Department of State and Israel have launched propaganda campaigns against Iran on Twitter.<sup>(16)</sup>

Some Iranian officials believe that the United States is exerting economic pressures on Iran and encouraging Iranians to protest the harsh economic conditions in their country. They also believe that the United States is playing a major role in directing and encouraging Iranian insurgent groups.<sup>(17)</sup>

In addition, the United States has continued its pressuring policy on all of Iran's trade partners to bring about an international unanimous decision on this country. In this regard, President Trump threatened countries and companies that violate US sanctions by doing business with Iran, especially in the oil sector to add them on the US blacklist and deprive them of doing business with the United States or using the American banking system.<sup>(18)</sup>

Based on the above, several delegates from the US Department of Treasury have recently visited several countries to ask for cooperation and support in the implementation of sanctions imposed on Iran. Some of these delegates visited Turkey and India on July 20, 2018 to convince both countries to stop buying Iran's oil by November 2018.<sup>(19)</sup> The US administration also held talks with oil companies working in Iran to skittle Iran's oil exports down to zero while other talks have been held with South Korea, Japan, China, and India to find alternatives to Iranian oil.<sup>(20)</sup>

At the time the United States is working on tightening sanctions on Iran, it will cooperate with its regional allies to exert more pressure on Tehran. This tendency appeared when President Trump agreed with some major oil producers such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the UAE to increase their oil production and to compensate for Iranian oil in global markets and stabilize world prices.<sup>(21)</sup> In addition, the US administration has conducted high level military coordination with Israel in case of any unexpected Iranian reaction to US sanctions. On the same issue, the Debka security website published a report concerning the establishment of four joint US-Israeli military headquarters as follows: Nuclear Headquarters responsible for all Iranian nuclear issues, Ballistic Headquarters responsible for the Iranian ballistic missile program, the Anti-Regional Expansion Headquarters to remove the Iranian presence in the Middle East, and the Economic Headquarters to coordinate US sanctions on Iran.<sup>(22)</sup>

### **The Iranian movements in the face of US pressures**

To face US pressures, President Rouhani visited Switzerland and Austria on July 2 and 4 respectively, 2018 in a European tour to gain their support to save the nuclear deal after the US withdrawal from the international pact, knowing that the Europeans are still opposing the US on this issue,<sup>(23)</sup> which has been reflected in the Vienna statement after negotiations between the Iranian Foreign Minister and the other five nuclear deal signatories- Russia, China, Germany, Britain, and France. The statement assured the European countries commitment to the agreement and their support to Iran by preserving economic relations and cooperation between them.<sup>(24)</sup>

In his meeting with the Iranian Foreign Ministry officials, the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei spoke of the role of smart diplomacy to expand Iran's foreign relations, to improve its elements of power and to preserve its political and diplomatic achievements.<sup>(25)</sup>

In addition, Iran influences world oil prices by threatening oil exports from the region in case it is stopped from exporting this vital product because of US sanctions.<sup>(26)</sup> Qassem Soleimani threatened the international shipping lanes in the Red Sea one day after the Houthis had targeted Saudi oil tankers at the Bab Mandeb Strait near the Yemeni coast.<sup>(27)</sup> In fact, Iran is fully aware that such provocative actions influence the world oil markets

and regional stability as well.

Iran depends on its internal front to face US pressures by adopting economic plans to increase its non-oil revenues. Accordingly, the Shura Council has passed a draft law titled, “Facing US sanctions”<sup>(28)</sup> to find solutions and alternatives, mainly, in the economic sector within the framework of the so-called Resistance Economy.<sup>(29)</sup>

Despite the talk of secret channels of communication between Iran and the United States, a well-informed source in the office of the president of the republic has denied this news about secret negotiations between the political advisor of the Presidency, Majid Takht Raunchy, and some American officials.<sup>(30)</sup>

Iran has denied the rumors of Omani mediation between Tehran and Washington in this concern.<sup>(31)</sup> However, some reports said that Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammed Javad Zarif secretly visited Oman and met his Omani counterpart, Yusuf Bin Alawi asking him to mediate between his country and the United States. What confirmed this news was the visit of Bin Alawi to Washington a week after Zarif’s visit. According to the Debka security website, President Trump has given his Secretary of Defense, James Mattis a green light to meet the Omani Foreign Minister and to start negotiations with Tehran. According to Omani sources, the meeting was about finding the best way to minimize tensions between Iran and the United States. On Friday, August 3, 2018, Oman announced an upcoming visit of Bin Alawi to Iran, which increases the likelihood of an Omani mediation between Washington and Tehran.<sup>(32)</sup>

The Iranian regime is using its experience and pressuring cards in the face of the United States and believes Washington is afraid of its defense capabilities. Despite the Iranian economy being exposed to several crises, it has always been able to overcome these problems.<sup>(33)</sup> However, survival of Iran’s nuclear deal away from the United States is an urgent need for Iran as this would negate the US sanctions.<sup>(34)</sup> Hence, Iranian efforts are concentrated on preserving the nuclear deal with the help of the other sides opposing US sanctions on Tehran.

Despite the Iranian escalatory statements, the Iranian interior is in conflict about negotiating with the United States or not. The Supreme Leader and his followers are against opening the door for negotiations with America while others have adopted an opposite tendency.<sup>(35)</sup> For example, a member of the Researchers and Teachers Assembly, Fazel Meybodi raised the question, “Why should disagreement with the United States remain forever; it is well to respond positively if our enemy moves toward negotiations?”<sup>(36)</sup> In addition, President Rouhani has been criticized for rejecting a request by President Trump to meet during the annual meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations as this was a great opportunity for Iran to negotiate rather than losing its leverage and being exposed to extortion and pressure.<sup>(37)</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Iran is now facing unprecedented challenges because of US pressures. Several companies have withdrawn their investments from Iran while its currency has recently suffered significant devaluation. Iran is also witnessing continuous demonstrations because of the harsh economic conditions in the country. In addition, it is uncertain that the nuclear deal signatories would fulfill their obligations towards Iran as they fear of US sanctions. On August 4, 2018, Iran will be banned from using the US dollar in its deals while it will be banned from the international banking systems in November 4, 2018.<sup>(38)</sup>

Iran is doubtful about survival of the nuclear deal. Some European countries support the US position on Iran while others are afraid of being exposed to US sanctions. In addition, the Iranian crisis gives the Europeans and Americans significant pressuring cards con-



cerning the US nuclear and non-nuclear demands on Iran.<sup>(39)</sup>

On the other hand, the United States is facing a number of challenges through its failure to impose well-organized sanctions on Iranian oil exports- at least 50% of the total exports- because of President Trump's inability to achieve international consensus to tighten sanctions on Iran, especially with China, the European countries, the other nuclear deal signatories, and some regional powers such as Turkey.<sup>(40)</sup> They dislike US unilateral policy in administering international files and defying its obligations and treaties.<sup>(41)</sup>

The EU countries voted with 28 majority votes to support Iran in line with the nuclear deal.<sup>(42)</sup> In addition, there is disagreement inside the Trump administration on the policy to be adopted on Iran. In the recent months, the United States has increased pressure on the Iranian economy, but President Trump's top advisors differ on using this pressure to reach a better agreement with Iran, which is evident of the fact that President Trump wants to bring the Iranians to the table and sign a new comprehensive deal with this country.<sup>(43)</sup>

Finally, the top buyers of Iranian oil, including the EU are facing difficulties in finding alternatives for its oil in other countries until the implementation of the second set of sanctions on Iran in November 2018. In addition, there is uncertainty about an increase in world oil production to compensate for Iranian oil because of US sanctions.<sup>(44)</sup>

Based on these assumptions, the United States is facing difficulties in achieving international consensus to impose a settlement on Iran like that of North Korea. The United States success in this regard relies on utilizing all its capabilities to achieve its main goal and modifying the behavior of the Iranian regime.

### **Russia-Iran Relations: Ali Akbar Velayati's visit to Moscow: Aims and repercussions**

This part attempts to shed light on the repercussions of the visit of Ali Akbar Velayati, the adviser to the Supreme Leader and his special envoy to Russia to meet President Vladimir Putin. It also will discuss the meeting coinciding with the meeting of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and US President Donald Trump with Putin.

It was only hours before Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu left Russia until Russian President Vladimir Putin discussed with Ali Akbar Velayati, regarding the situation in Syria, bilateral relations and the nuclear agreement, as well as economic cooperation between the two countries. This came after Velayati handed the Russian leader two hand-

written messages. The first was from the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the second was sent by President Hassan Rouhani. They deal with the two countries' political, commercial and economic ties.

The talks held at the Kremlin focused on two important issues for the Iranians. The first concerned the regional aspect and Iran's role in Syria, while the second broached the nuclear deal and the ongoing sanctions imposed by the US on the Iranian economy.<sup>(45)</sup>

It seems that Iran is in the process of strengthening its economic and political cooperation with influential countries such as Russia and China considering the American pressure and the difficult economic conditions facing Iran, especially after the withdrawal of the US from the nuclear agreement. This comes as Iran seeks to benefit from its diplomatic potential and international relations as much as possible. It aims to find a way out as a tremendous mess is laying ahead for the country because of US economic sanctions expected to take effect within days.



Before his meeting with Vladimir Putin, Velayati said that the two sides reached an agreement on several regional and international issues, asserting Russia's support for the nuclear agreement. He also stressed the readiness of Russia to invest in Iran's oil and gas sector worth up to \$ 50 billion. He noted that such tremendous investments in the energy sector may help make up for the losses that foreign companies may cause after leaving Iran for fear of US sanctions.<sup>(46)</sup>

But the Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov denied Velayati's comments on an agreement with Putin to invest up to \$ 50 billion in Iran's oil and gas sector. "I cannot support that, and I cannot go into more details in this respect," he said.<sup>(47)</sup> This confirms that Velayati's statements about Russia's intention to invest \$ 50 billion in Iranian oil and gas are far from reality. The matter is believed to be nothing

more than rumors aimed to quell the uproar raging at home through instilling hope inside Iranians and assuring the street that the regime has an alternative that enable it to avert US sanctions.

Under European sanctions against Russia and US threats to impose sanctions on all countries dealing with Iran, talking about Russia's cooperation with Iran in the oil field may be just an Iranian attempt to ease the fears of the Iranian street over the effects of US economic sanctions in the coming days.

According to the Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak, who held lengthy meetings

with Velayati, Russia has proposed to provide Russian goods in exchange for Iranian oil at a time when Russia is studying the legal issues of the proposal submitted in this regard.<sup>(48)</sup> This is proof of Russia's unwillingness to invest in Iranian oil and gas. The withdrawal of the Russian Lukoil company from Iran last May is further evidence of Russia's unwillingness to invest in the Iranian oil and gas sector at the time being.<sup>(49)</sup>

Russian exports to Iran since the beginning of 2017 until September of the same year were estimated at only \$ 977.4 million, while Iran was not subject to US sanctions, while Russian exports to the United States amounted to \$ 7.644 billion.<sup>(50)</sup>

When comparing between the volume of investment announced by Velayati and the Russian exports over the last year, we will find a big gap between the actual volume of exports and the figures announced by Velayati.

According to Iranian economists including an expert in Russian affairs Afshar Suleimani, the conditions are not prepared for Russia to invest this huge amount. They added it is unable to solve the problems and crises suffered by Iran, noting Russia has not previously invested large amounts in Iran and cannot resolve the dilemma of the nuclear agreement.<sup>(51)</sup>

### **Concurrent visit for Velayati and Netanyahu: what is the relationship?**

Velayati's visit to Moscow coincided with the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who visited Russia on July 11 for talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Netanyahu and Putin discussed Iranian presence and Hezbollah militias in Syria, as well as Israeli security concerns over Iran's missile program. He informed Putin that he would not allow Iran and its allies to be on Syrian territory, stressing that the Syrian regime must abide by the 1974 disengagement agreement. The aim of the meeting was to convince Putin that Syrian President Bashar Assad would remain in power in return for Iran and all its allied militias pull out of Syria, given the danger posed by these armed militias to the Israeli occupation.<sup>(52)</sup>

On the other hand, Putin stressed the Russian commitment to implement the agreement between Russia and Israel on the withdrawal of Iran and its militia from the border area of the Israeli occupation, suggesting that the issue of the withdrawal of Iranian forces from Syrian territory shall be delayed until the start of a push for a comprehensive political settlement.<sup>(53)</sup>

It seems that the significance of the two visits coincides with Moscow's attempt to strengthen its interests with the Iranian and Israeli sides and to control the reactions of the parties to the Syrian crisis. By doing this, Moscow seeks to prevent clashes between the Israeli and Iranian sides in the Southern Syrian border areas.

### **Trump-Putin Summit in Helsinki and its relationship to the Iranian issue**

Following his meeting with the Israeli Prime Minister and the Advisor to the Iranian Leader Ali Akbar Velayati, the Russian and US Presidents held a Summit in the Finnish capital Helsinki on July 16. The Iranian file was high on the agenda of the two-hour closed Summit.

In the press conference held by the two presidents after the Summit, President Trump spoke about the necessity of cooperation between Russia and America in Syria and working to return Syrian refugees in Europe to their homeland. It also stressed the importance of preserving Israel's national security and continuing pressure on Iran. On the other hand, Putin supported these statements, stressing Russia's determination to combat terrorism in Syria. He also asserted the need to abide by the 1974 agreement between Syria

and Israel, which guarantees the security and safety of Israel.

These statements may be read as an initial agreement between the United States, Russia and Israel on the need for Iranian withdrawal from Syria, albeit gradually.

Russia, which has no formal and official agreement with the United States until now on the Syrian issue, seeks to win all parties and create a policy of consensus among the parties to the crisis. It may be working to keep Iran in Syria in a way that does not pose a threat to Israel's security. Despite the tension in the relationship between Tehran and Moscow during the last period on the future of Iranian presence in Syria, the visit to Moscow to Velayati proved that the Iranians continue to attach great importance to cooperation with Russia in various fields. Iran seeks to earn Russia's support for its presence in Syria, the nuclear deal and easing the economic crisis, which will worsen as the US sanctions will be applied in the few coming days.

This Israeli-American-Iranian rush towards Moscow opens a number of options for Russia to deal with the Iranian side in the coming period:

The first option is to cooperate with the United States and Israel in Syria to pressure Iran to withdraw directly from Syrian territory and stop dealing with Iran because of US sanctions.

The second option is that Russia fully favors Iran by rebelling against US sanctions and supporting Iran's presence in Syrian territory.

The third and final option is for Russia to continue to seek a successful balance and consensus policy among all parties.

Putin is likely to opt for the most beneficial scenario for Russia. In this case, the latter scenario is more useful than others are, because bias towards one side has political and economic implications and repercussions that may negatively affect Russia. Russia seeks to balance all parties in Syria to guarantee its political and economic interests in Syria, which rest in Assad's stay in power.

Russia is also aware of the importance of Iranian presence, which will help Assad's regime maintain power. At the same time, it fully realizes the impact of any clash between Israeli forces and Iranian militias in Syria. Therefore, it is likely that Russia is currently working to ensure the safety and security of Israel by pressing Iran to withdraw and its affiliated militias from the Southern border area. Moscow, on the other hand, may seek to strike a balance in its foreign policy with America instead of aligning itself with Iran, since Russian economic interests and policy with the United States are greater than Russian interests with Iran are.

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# CONCLUSION

## INTERNAL AFFAIR

1. President Rouhani used revolutionary speeches to lessen the hardliner's pressure on his government.
2. Hardliners rallying around President Rouhani in the very recent period might prevent him from his reform and moderate positions.
3. The latest revolutionary policies of President Rouhani have increased reformists doubt that he might withdraw from supporting moderates and reformists.
4. Iran is still far from manufacturing modern tanks that can compete with other regional tanks
5. The Iranian military forces are not capable of adopting and understanding the technology of modern tanks.
6. The Iranian Zulfiqar and Karrar tanks are only two new names of US and Russian-made tanks which have been redesigned.
7. The Chief of the Iranian police has admitted an increasing movement of what he called, "enemies of the revolution" which is evidence that Iran has recently witnessed fierce battles on its borders.
8. The Iranian regime continues to accuse its neighbors of any uprising or demands of armed groups asking for their rights in the Kurdistan, Sistan and Baluchistan, and Ahwaz provinces.
9. Due to the spread of severe poverty in Sistan, the Balochi young people are being exposed to the danger of being attracted by armed groups and drug dealers.
10. Governmental interference in the economy has increased and the country tends to adopt the policy of "Resistance Economy" to face US sanctions by focusing on local industry.
11. Smuggling and the aging means of production will be the most important challenges for the policy of "Resistance economy." The Iranian local industries will face recession unless the government eliminates smuggling in the country.
12. Crude oil exports decreased from 2.3 million barrels to 1.9 barrels per day.
13. A number of companies working in the shipping and currency-exchange sectors have left the Iranian market.
14. The Iranian investments in the Turkish real-estate sector have increased to preserve the purchasing power of savings.
15. Replacement of the Central Bank governor is an attempt to stabilize monetary policy after the devaluation of the local currency to 11900 Toman against the US dollar by the end of July.
16. The Iranian authorities fear the transformation of religiosity and its forms at the Hawza (religious authority) and societal levels.
17. The police repression of women who took off their Hijab has led to significant disputes between supporters and opponents of this policy inside the Iranian regime itself.
18. The regime has failed to face thinking by thinking and talks by talks and has always adopted a tough position to settle its intellectual and jurisprudential problems.

19. All societal manifestations support a decline of Khomeini's ideas and the failure of religiosity that has been adopted since the 1979 revolution until today.

## ARAB AFFAIR

1. Demonstrations in the Iraqi Southern provinces represent another blow to Iran after the winning of the Sa'eroun coalition (Bypassing Sectarianism Coalition). These demonstrations are harder on Iran as they have erupted in Shiite territories and are a good opportunity for the GCC countries, especially after the failure of Iraq-Iran negotiations to resume exporting electricity to Iraq, knowing that this sector represents a strong Iranian pressuring card on Iraq.

2. Russia has changed its stance in favor of Iran in terms of driving Iranian militias out of Syria as it believes in the significance of Iranian military presence to protect Russian interests in this country, given that 80% of the forces fighting in Syria belong to Iran and its militias while only 20% belong to the Assad regime that is considered the weakest on the ground and have become under Iranian command. Hence, driving Iranian militias out of Syria, as requested by Israel, is not an easy option.

3. The Houthi rebels are being exposed to significant blows and setbacks as the legitimate forces progress in Yemen under air cover by the Arab coalition under the leadership of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in several important provinces- Taiz, Sadah, Nahm, and Hodeida. As a result, the Houthis have retreated and left their positions. They launched ballistic missile attacks on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and threatened international shipping lanes after intercepting two Saudi oil tankers in the Red Sea.

## INTERNATIONAL AFFAIR

1. The Trump policy on Iran has achieved its goals. The Iranian regime is suffering a devaluation of its currency with the approach of US sanctions on Iran on August 6, 2018. This policy has forced several foreign companies to withdraw their investments in Iran while other projects have been halted until the whole situation becomes clearer. Some countries announced their rejection of the US position on Iran. However, they will be obliged to follow the US policy for fears of being exposed to US sanctions and pressures; a position perceived by the Iranian regime.

2. Trump called Iran to come to the table, but Iran has rejected to negotiate with the United States. Nevertheless, the harsh internal conditions might oblige Iran to sit at the table with the United States, given that President Trump bets on his policies to break the Iranian file like his policy on North Korea. Hence, Omani mediation might work and both sides might come to the table of negotiations. However, any mediation between both sides might be different from previous mediations in terms of reaching a prompt agreement between both sides because of President Trumps pressuring policy and his strong position on Iran. In addition, President Trump wants to end the Iranian file to achieve one of his most important electoral pledges and reach an agreement with Iran that will differ from the previous one signed by the Obama administration and the other five nuclear deal signatories in a way that will resolve all disturbing points to the United States and its allies such as the Iranian nuclear program, its ballistic missiles, and regional behavior.

3. The visit of Ali Akbar Velayati to Moscow reflects the positive relations between Russia and Iran and the level of coordination between the two countries, knowing that Rus-

sia has promised Iran to save the nuclear deal after the US withdrawal from the international pact and tries to make a balance in relations between Israel and Iran in Syria.

## REACTIONS

### INTERNAL AFFAIR

#### Politics

- » A member of the reformist movement “Amal” (Hope) in the Iranian parliament, Ali Reza Rahimi says that President Rouhani’s latest positions have been within the framework of national reconciliation.
- » Iranian MPs wrote two letters to President Rouhani and Chief of the Judiciary, Ali Sadiq Larijani, asking them to improve economic conditions by stabilizing economic security, eliminating monopolies and ending high prices, as well as countering economic corruption.
- » In a press release, President Rouhani says, “Iran will preserve the nuclear deal away from the United States in case of securing its own interests.”
- » The IRGC Commander, Mohammed Ali Jafari says that the threat facing Iran is not a US military operation, but the weak internal front.
- » The Adl (justice) Army stipulates exchanging the Iranian kidnapped soldier, Sa’eed Barati since April 2017 for several prisoners in Iran.
- » Iran’s Minister of Defense, Brigadier Amir Hatimi commences a new line of production of Fakour Air to Air missiles.
- » The Commander of the IRGC ground forces says that his forces have launched more than twenty intelligence and field operations to track the movement of terrorist groups.
- » The Iranian Prosecutor announces the execution of the eight individuals accused of storming the parliament and Khomeini’s tomb.
- » Unknown militants kill the Sunni cleric, Molavi Abdushakour Kurd (Tirshabi), Imam of the Sunni Tawhidiah Mosque in the city of Khas in the Sistan and Baluchistan province.

#### Economics

- » In response to US threats of depriving Iran of exporting oil, the Iranian President Rouhani threatens of closing the Straits of Hormuz.
- » The price of foreign currencies and gold in Iran is at a record in the month of July with the approach of US sanctions on this country.
- » The former Chief of the Radhawiyah shrine foundation and a former presidential candidate, Ebrahim Raisi declines a request by the central bank to establish a private bank for religious foundations.

#### Ideology

- » The release of twenty-two people of the Dervish Sufis.
- » Former President, Mohammed Khatami says that Iran is a hundred years backward in terms of freedoms and minorities rights.
- » Hawza jurists announce their support to President Rouhani and the government in

the face of US sanctions.

- » The Iranian Cultural Advisor in Nigeria, Mahmoud Azeemi Nasr Abadi, and the Universal Mustafa University Chancellor, Falah Zarumi meet with the executive director in the Nigerian Ministry of Education to discuss means of cultural, science, and religious cooperation between the two countries.
- » The resignation of the Jumu'ah Imam of the city of Borujerd province.
- » The Iranian parliament questions the Intelligence Minister about preventing Molavi Abdul Hamid from moving in Iranian provinces.

### ARAB AFFAIR

- » Some Iraqi activists on social media confirm the suspension of issuing Iraqi visa to Iranians in response to the Iranian procedure of cutting off electricity to Iraq.
- » A member of the Amid Coalition in the Iranian parliament, Jalal Mirza'i announces that Iraq is waiting for a unanimous Shiite consensus on the new Iraqi prime minister.
- » The Advisor of Iran's Foreign Minister calls for talks with regional countries, especially Saudi Arabia to bring security and stability to the region.
- » The top assistant to Iran's Foreign Minister for political affairs, Hussein Jabiri Ansari asserts that the presence of Iranian forces in Syria relies on an agreement between Tehran and Damascus.
- » The American Blumberg website publishes an analysis of experts expecting an Israeli strike on Iran.
- » More than 121 people away from a fight in the Yemeni Hodeida province.
- » The Houthi rebels enlist more than 20 thousand Yemeni children.
- » The Yemeni scholars condemn the Houthi crimes.

### INTERNATIONAL AFFAIR

- » The Iranian President Rouhani threatens oil exports in the Gulf in case Iran is stopped from exporting its oil and the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei praises these threats saying, "Important statements and represent the regime's tendencies."
- » The US President Donald Trump threatens Iran of paying a heavy price if it takes any inappropriate action.
- » Trump says he is ready to meet Iranian leaders, saying "No preconditions; anytime they want" in response to a question if he was willing to meet his Iranian counterpart President Rouhani.
- » The US Department of Treasury announces it will not grant anybody waivers from its US sanctions on Iran to reach an unprecedented level of pressure which President Trump had threatened Iran of before.



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# IRAN CASE FILE

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