

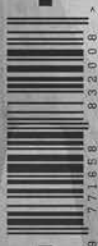
MONTHLY REPORT



# IRAN CASE FILE

Your window on Iran from inside and abroad

July 2022



**RASANA**  
المعهد الدولي للدراسات الإيرانية  
International Institute for Iranian Studies

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# IRAN CASE FILE

July 2022

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In July 2022, the Middle East was awash with new developments. Saudi Arabia hosted the Jeddah Summit for Security and Development, which was attended by US President Joe Biden and leaders from several Arab countries. Meanwhile, the Iranian capital Tehran hosted a trilateral summit attended by leaders from Turkey, Russia and Iran. The summit was an attempt, particularly by Iran, to closely monitor the outcomes of the Jeddah summit. It revealed the extent of Iranian concerns about the potential formation of an anti-Iranian regional alliance that would put it under additional pressure. The Iran Case File (ICF) places particular focus on the outcomes of the Jeddah summit, the Iranian reactions to it and its implications for the various issues that concern the Iranian arena.

Internally, at the ideological level, the leaders who partook in the Jeddah summit were unequivocal about addressing the threat of terrorism, whether perpetrated by Sunni or Shiite groups or by groups or countries defying the global order. The leaders concluded that the danger posed by terrorism impedes the fulfilment of peoples' aspirations in some regional countries. It also threatens the stability and security of the nation state. All of the speeches at the summit, whether delivered by the leaders of the main regional actors or by the president of the United States representing the global superpower, reflected the unanimous will to continue the fight against terrorism and to prevent extremists from filling any voids or creating hotspots from which they can spread their ideologies and destroy countries and societies. Elsewhere, the hijab crisis in Iran remains unresolved amid popular protests against the law making it mandatory, prompting the Iranian authorities to crack down on



protestors. This crackdown indicates that the Iranian government will continue to pursue the same old policies and that there is no genuine intention to change its behavior at home or even ease its policy of using violence against its own citizens.

Politically, the Iranian reactions to the Jeddah Security and Development Summit — attended by US President Joe Biden and several Arab leaders — revealed how deeply Iran fears the formation of an anti-Iranian alliance by the leaders who partook in the summit. As a result, Iran rushed to hold a summit in Tehran, which was attended by Russian President Vladimir Putin, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi. Despite Iranian concerns about the outcomes of the Jeddah summit, the results were contrary to Iranian expectations. The leaders who attended the Jeddah summit urged the region's countries to pursue diplomacy and strengthen cooperation. They also urged Iran to cooperate and follow the principle of good neighborliness.

Iran is looking for safe havens to help it overcome the US and European sanctions imposed on its economy and most vital resources. To this end, Iran attempted to entice Russia to its side by hosting a summit in Tehran, which included Ankara. Iran, through cooperation with Russia, attempted to act against the US weaponization of sanctions on its energy sector that have put immense pressure on the Iranian economy. Iran and Russia announced the signing of a memorandum of understanding for the development of Tehran's oil and gas sectors. The memorandum is in addition to the other agreements and understandings signed by the two parties in recent months. Although the Iranian and Russian governments hoped to achieve several political and economic benefits from the Tehran summit, there were also significant negative consequences.

As for the Military File, it touched on the strategic partnership that the United States and Israel discussed during Biden's visit to Tel Aviv. The two countries reaffirmed their common interests, particularly to prevent Iran from possessing nuclear weapons. Iran meanwhile anticipates the ramifications of a potential failure of reviving the nuclear deal amid a growing nuclear crisis as Iran has revealed its ability to manufacture a nuclear bomb and threaten enemies with a "tough response." In response to Iran's efforts to develop a nuclear weapon, the United States announced a bipartisan commitment to support Israel. Iran's strategic partnership with Russia, on the other hand, has grown stronger than ever. This partnership could result in an Iranian presence in Russia's war on Ukraine, albeit limited. Russia and Iran may eventually launch a joint drone development program. However, this is heavily dependent on the outcome of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

There were numerous developments in Iran-Arab relations, particularly in Iran-Gulf relations, which saw remarkable developments in July. The visit of US President Joe Biden to Saudi Arabia, as well as his participation in the Jeddah Summit for Security and Development, was a strong starting point for recalibrating US regional strategic relations. Among the topics discussed at the summit were Iran's relations with the region and the world, as well as the

need for the region to be free of weapons of mass destruction. Despite Iranian concerns that the outcomes of the summit included a call to form an anti-Iranian alliance, the speeches of the region's leaders, especially the Gulf states, reflected the desire to avoid the policy of polarization.

At the Jeddah summit, the Yemeni crisis took precedence over all other humanitarian, economic, political, and military issues. During the summit, the leaders emphasized the importance of continuing to support the Presidential Leadership Council and development efforts in Yemen. Furthermore, the participating leaders condemned Iran's destabilizing role in the region, particularly in Yemen, and emphasized the importance of the Yemeni-Yemeni truce in paving the way for an internal dialogue that meets the people's aspirations.

At the Iraqi level, the country has entered a more complicated stage, portending the outbreak of intra-Shiite conflict in light of the mounting anger on the Iraqi street as a result of the country's accumulating crises. Supporters of maverick Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr took to the streets, stormed the Iraqi Parliament, and declared an open sit-in in response to the Coordination Framework's nomination of Mohammad al-Sudani as Iraq's prime minister. The Coordination Framework responded by implying that its supporters might take to the streets. Sadr is expected to use the protests to call for a change in the entire regime, which would move Iraq closer to independence and provide more options for its foreign relations.

Concerning the Syrian crisis, the Iranian capital Tehran hosted a trilateral summit on July 19, 2022, bringing together the leaders of the Astana process: Russia, Iran, and Turkey. The summit aimed to discuss the Syrian crisis and seek a solution. Despite the fact that the Syrian conflict was supposed to be the summit's main issue, its timing indicated other reasons for holding it rather than the Syrian issue. Concerns about the outcomes of the Jeddah summit and the potential regional and international alliances, which could harm Russia and Iran, ranked high as the main issues on the summit's agenda. The summit, according to the final communique, did not result in agreements to resolve the outstanding issues between the Astana process's three guarantors. However, the summit's significance was in the bilateral meetings and the Iranian gains achieved as a result of regional and international developments. These developments increased Iran's presence in Syria, necessitating engagement in understandings with it regarding northern Syria — in contrast to the previous stages, when Moscow and Ankara preferred to hold bilateral understandings without Tehran.

On the global stage, relations between the United States and Iran remain stagnant amid stalled diplomacy. The final step down this road was the European mediation efforts to bring the opposing viewpoints closer together, settle outstanding issues, and resurrect the nuclear deal. The two sides appear determined not to let the nuclear deal die as it serves as an effective model of diplomacy, serving the interests of both countries. This was evident in President Joe Biden's declaration during his Middle East tour. During his tour, which included a visit to occupied Jerusalem and Jeddah in Saudi Arabia, the

priority was given to diplomacy in resolving disagreements over Iran's nuclear program. Simultaneously, he reiterated his readiness to use all available resources to prevent Iran from possessing a nuclear weapon. In the meantime, Biden reiterated his commitment to pursuing a credible strategy to address other issues that worry regional leaders, particularly the targeting of their territories with rockets and drones and countering Iran's clout, which threatens regional stability. Iran fears that Biden's visit will result in major challenges to its interests and the formation of an anti-Iranian alliance that will threaten the government's stability. Therefore, Tehran deemed it necessary to re-engage in talks with the Europeans in an attempt to resurrect the nuclear deal along the lines of the Vienna talks.

In terms of Iran-Europe interactions, the Belgian Parliament agreed to ratify a prisoner swap treaty with Iran, specifically to exchange the Iranian diplomat Assadollah Assadi, who is being held in Brussels, for the Belgian citizen Olivier Vandecasteele, who is being held in Iran's Evin prison on espionage charges. Ratifying this highly controversial treaty infuriated political pressure groups and human rights organizations. Amnesty International warned that this treaty would result in impunity for Iranians involved in hunting down opponents of the Iranian government. The European countries, on the other hand, continue to engage in futile diplomacy with Iran. France has resumed its policy of warning Iran that time is running out. Paris emphasized the importance of reaching a nuclear deal before it is too late. This comes against the backdrop of Iran's installation of newer, faster centrifuges at its underground enrichment facility in Natanz.



# IRAN CASE FILE

July 2022

# Internal Affairs

**I**nternal Affairs is divided into four main files. The Ideological File discusses four main topics: the strategy to counter terrorism discussed at the Jeddah summit hosted in July 2022, the increasing anti-hijab protests in Iran, the Iranian government's reaction to such protests. The Political File reviews the internal reactions to the Jeddah and Tehran summits, shedding light on the indications, outcomes and timing. The Economic File analyzes two topics: the economic dimension of the Jeddah and Tehran summits and Iran's economic losses and gains in this regard. The Military File discusses two topics: the US-Israel announcement to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions and the implications of Iran's drone deal with Russia.



# The Ideological File

The Ideological File sheds light on Shiite religious elites in general and Iranian religious elites in particular. It also highlights their impact on the religious and political scene in Iran, as well as the implications for the region's Shiite community. The Ideological File of the past month discussed the politicization of religion in the discourse of Iranian marjas against the backdrop of them fearing the loss of public confidence, thereby impacting their clout and economic interests. The file also touched on the efforts of the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice to increase its influence and dominance under Raisi and its attempts to penetrate society. This month, the Ideological File sheds light on two issues: the counterterrorism strategy reflected in the discourse of the leaders who partook in the Jeddah summit on July 15, 2022. The second issue is the continuation and exacerbation of the tensions caused by the split over the hijab issue in Iran and the position of the government toward it.

## **The Jeddah Summit: Counter-Terrorism Discourse**

The discourse of the leaders who attended the Jeddah summit was not without warnings against terrorism and extremism. Most of the countries represented at the summit have suffered devastating waves of terrorism, whether domestic terrorism that threatens the social structure and fabric of a country or external terrorism that undermines a country's stability and national security.

The speeches of national leaders, particularly of those that have experienced the horrors of terrorism, such as Egypt and Iraq, focused on terrorism and warned against its dangers. Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden's speech did not prioritize counter-terrorism. There are several reasons for this including the fall of ISIS, a decline in its military and ideological threat, and the United States' focus on making Israel acceptable in the Arab world and integrating it into the regional security equation. These efforts have been rejected by the Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar, who reiterated the centrality of the Arab Peace Initiative. This is in addition to the United States' desire to ensure global oil price stability, prompting it to repair ties with the Gulf states in general and Saudi Arabia in particular. However, the United States is preoccupied with the Iranian issue and the nuclear talks. It is aware that this is a top priority for the Gulf states, and Biden's trip to the region in light of the global energy crisis aimed to mend fences and appease the Gulf governments in any way possible. All these aforementioned factors dimmed the focus on counterterrorism in Biden's speech. He nonetheless pointed to the matter, saying: "We — but we maintain both the capacity and the absolute determination to suppress the terrorist threat wherever we find it. We've demonstrated that this year — eliminating the Emir of ISIS on a daring operation, and just this week, taking



out another key leader of ISIS. We're going to continue our counter-terrorism efforts working with a broad coalition of countries, including everyone around this table. And we will turn our attention and our resources to supporting our partners, strengthening our alliances, and building coalitions to solve the problems facing this region and the world — and the world today.”<sup>(1)</sup> This brief message includes reassurances to the region's countries that the United States will continue to pursue its counter-terrorism strategy and the other issues that it is preoccupied with will not impede the continuation of this strategy.

Meanwhile, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi stated that terrorism was the key challenge for the region's countries. “Terrorism remains a primary challenge from whose woes Arab countries have suffered for centuries. Therefore, we renew our commitment to combating terrorism and extremist thought in all its fashions and forms — with the aim of obliterating all its affiliated organizations and armed militias spread throughout several parts of our Arab world.”<sup>(2)</sup> According to Sisi, the problem lies in the fact that terrorist groups are used by some of the region's countries to achieve their destructive objectives. Hence, these groups impede the will and aspirations of the people.

He also warned of militia-style terrorism sponsored by some countries (ostensibly Iran) in the region. He said, “In this context, I reiterate that (concepts of) militias, mercenaries and armed gangs have no place in the region.” He added, “Their supporters, who provide them with safe havens, funds, weapons and training as well as allowing terrorists to be relocated from one location to another should reconsider their incorrect calculations and assessments, and recognize unequivocally that we have zero tolerance when it comes to protecting our national security and the redlines associated with it. And we will use all means to protect our security, interests, and rights.”<sup>(3)</sup>

Not only did Sisi's speech provide a clarification of the reality facing the region, but he also proposed solutions to combat terrorism. This was made clear through several points, including:

First: enhancing democracy through what he called building communities from within, which are established on democracy, citizenship, equality, respecting human rights, rejecting confessional and extremist ideologies, and giving precedence to the concept of national interests. Second: enhancing the nation state through developing its capabilities, cadre and resources to undertake its tasks in terms of laying the foundations of good governance, fostering security, and enforcing law. Third: enhancing the role of religious establishments through spreading the culture of moderation and tolerance, which ensures enjoying the right to freely embrace and practice one's faith. As such, the speech pointed to Sunni and Shiite terrorism, the two major sources of threat to national security and the nation state.

In a similar vein, Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani called for the prohibition of the possession of weapons outside state control. He also made a passing reference to Shiite militias in Iraq and Lebanon. He said, “In general, we must agree on rules that we all respect [...]. These rules include confining the tools of violence to the hands of the state, and distinguishing between the consensual system and the quota system. The quota system may go beyond partnership in political representation to sharing the state and its institutions as if they were spoils, in a way that would cripple and render them unable to carry out their functions.

These principles also serve as a steering guide in Iraq and Lebanon, which are experiencing crises of another kind.”<sup>(4)</sup>

As for Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, he did not point the finger of blame at the pro-Wilayat al-Faqih militias as being one of the key sources of threat to Iraq’s political stability. However, he mentioned the triumph over ISIS. “Iraq played a critical role in combating terrorism and defeating ISIS in collaboration with its brotherly countries, neighbors, and friends. But we still have a long way to go to eradicate terrorism.”<sup>(5)</sup>

But there is state-sponsored terrorism, primarily from Iran, which has impacted the Gulf states and entire region. Biden also emphasized the United States’ determination to prevent Iran from possessing nuclear weapons. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman was keen to keep the door open for cooperation between the region’s countries including Iran, a neighboring country with shared religious and cultural bonds. “We call on Iran, as a neighboring country, with which we share religious and cultural ties, to cooperate with the countries of the region to be part of this vision, by adhering to the principles of international legitimacy, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, cooperating with the International Atomic Energy Agency, and fulfilling its obligations in this regard,” Prince Mohammed bin Salman said.”<sup>(6)</sup> He laid out a rational, moderate and practical strategy to counter the threat of Iranian-backed terrorism, including the acknowledgement of common cultural bonds, the importance of Iran’s adherence to international treaties and laws, Tehran refraining from interfering in the affairs of other countries, and cooperating with the IAEA. If Tehran complies with these principles, its armed militias in the region will be stripped of their legitimacy. If it does the opposite, its true intentions will be exposed in front of the international community.

### **Abolishing the Hijab and Iranian National Security**

Iran’s religious elite regard the hijab issue as an integral part of the post-1979 Iranian revolutionary identity, and believe that making any concessions regarding the codification of its obligatory status will undermine Iranian national security. Protests against legislation mandating the wearing of the hijab continue in Iran, with supporters and opponents split. Some protesters against the compulsory status of the hijab in Iran have been arrested. According to the Secretary of the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice Muhammad Saleh Hashemi-Golpayegan, chastity and the hijab are symbols of the conflict between Western and Iranian/Islamic culture. “If we allow this wall to be demolished, all of the regime’s other walls will collapse,” he said.”<sup>(7)</sup> Abolishing the hijab law, in his opinion, will be followed by the erosion of Iranian culture shaped by clerics after the 1979 revolution. Therefore, this will help the West to be successful in imposing its hegemony. In the meantime, the Assembly of Experts discussed the hijab issue alongside other strategic issues such as the nuclear deal and the economic situation. “Three issues were discussed in the assembly’s meeting: the economic problems, the nuclear file, and the hijab,” said Ahmad Khatami, a member of the Assembly of Experts.<sup>(8)</sup> Having the hijab issue on the table alongside the nuclear deal and the economic situation demonstrates how far the ruling elite considers the hijab to be significant in the public sphere — on par with the nuclear issue. “The third issue that was discussed was the hijab, which unfortunately is not properly

observed by some people,” Khatami added. “They purposefully remove their hijab in public places, which is a violation of the law that should be enacted in this regard. No one talks about forcing (them to wear it), but we do talk about enforcing the law.” Members of the Assembly of Experts reiterated that the hijab law is just like all other laws that should be implemented. The hijab issue is entirely Koranic. According to experts,<sup>(9)</sup> it is one of the requirements for “sound religious belief.”

Khatami sheds light on an important point here. He claims that the government does not compel people to wear the hijab. But, as he asserts, the hijab law should be properly enforced. This is an attempt to lessen domestic and international criticism of the Iranian authorities’ violations of human rights and freedom.

Following the government’s arrests and targeting of those protesting against the law making the hijab mandatory, Farah Pahlavi issued a statement in response. She praised the Iranian women’s struggle while condemning the ongoing attacks and attempts to humiliate them. “Not a day goes by without news and images of attacks on women and violation of their rights, disturbing the souls of noble Iranians, but the news of the civil struggle of women and men of my land against any kind of coercion and discrimination is a source of pride and honor.”<sup>(10)</sup>

## Conclusion

The speeches of leaders and heads of state at the Jeddah summit warned of terrorism, which they view as a major challenge to state security and social cohesion. According to them, it is just as dangerous as the rest of the economic and political challenges. Most of the speeches focused on the threat posed by terrorism and militias to the nation state; militias also impede the will and ambitions of the people. Two important conclusions can be drawn from this: the first is that the summit occurred at an appropriate time to send a message to Iran that the region’s countries stand united against militias and terrorism. They will go to any lengths to ensure their security and the interests of their peoples are safeguarded. The second is the resulting security and intelligence cooperation, which will worsen the crisis faced by militias and terrorist outfits in the region. This will also assist the region’s countries in fostering stability, wielding influence, and strengthening the role of the nation state.

On the domestic front in Iran, the hijab crisis persisted, with protests by young men and women continuing unabated. This prompted the authorities to arrest several protesters. It also prompted the Assembly of Experts to debate the issue alongside other national security issues such as the nuclear issue and the economy. This was followed by a flood of comments warning of the ramifications of rescinding the hijab law, which is a binding law that cannot be broken. Simultaneously, the government seeks to move beyond the economic crisis by directing public opinion toward religious and controversial issues by extending the clout of the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice and clerics, allowing the former to permeate the Iranian street, interfere in Iranians’ private lives, and directly impact public freedoms. This indicates that the government has no intention of changing its behavior at home or even loosening its grip on citizens’ religious and political freedoms. Though the government believes it is protecting the country’s culture and identity, it will harm the revolutionary ideology by increasing the number of its foes at home as well as the number of those protesting against its repressive policies, particularly young men, women, and the post-revolution generations.



# The Political File

The June 2022 Political File shed light on the resignation of the Iranian government's minister of labor following a series of criticisms and failures during his 10-month tenure. The file also discussed a bill introduced by the government to enhance the security forces' powers in terms of using firearms which was sent to the Parliament for approval. In July, the file touches on internal Iranian reactions to the Jeddah Security and Development Summit, which the United States and several Arab countries attended. The file also sheds light on the significations of holding the Tehran summit attended by Russian President Vladimir Putin, Turkish President Tayyip Erdoğan, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi.

## **The Internal Iranian Reactions to the Jeddah Summit and Its Outcomes**

Tehran has always viewed the United States' strong presence in the region, as well as its strategic ties with several Gulf states, as a threat to its future and an impediment to its expansionist project in the region. As the United States began to withdraw from Afghanistan, reduce its presence in Iraq, and downgrade the importance of the Middle East in its foreign policy agenda, Iran believed the time was right to resume its expansionist project. However, Biden's visit, as well as the resulting alliances and agreements, caused Tehran to reconsider its calculations in this regard. Tehran has realized how difficult, if not impossible, it is for the United States to abandon its strategic partnerships in the region. This was clear from the numerous interviews and analyses published in official Iranian newspapers covering the Jeddah summit and Biden's visit to Saudi Arabia. Some newspapers said that Biden's visit to Saudi Arabia was a cause of shame for him, as he had said during his election campaign that he would be tough on Saudi Arabia. However, according to the Iranian newspapers, Biden is assisting Saudi Arabia now. The analyses concluded that the United States has no plans to leave the region. Thus, it is imperative for Iran to strengthen its defense capabilities to counter the threat it may face in the future.<sup>(11)</sup>

The Iranians believe that the intent behind Biden's visit to the region was to form an Arab-Israeli alliance to encircle Iran, and widen the Arab-Israeli alliance which has started to expand and take on an international dimension. The Iranian newspaper Mostaqil argued the point that the resumption of the nuclear talks and reaching a resolution that ends the nuclear program standoff are the best ways to thwart the goals behind Biden's visit to the region.<sup>(12)</sup>

Some Iranian "reformist" newspapers expressed concern that the region might see more confrontations and alliances involving major world powers and regional countries. This could have far-reaching consequences for all

sides. According to Arman Melli newspaper, Biden's main reason for visiting Saudi Arabia and meeting with several regional leaders was to create the best conditions for securing Arab support for the United States' anti-Russian policies. It concluded that the US administration is fully aware that securing Arab support requires the formation of a regional anti-Iran alliance, which means a return to the anti-Iran strategy pursued by former US President Donald Trump.<sup>(13)</sup>

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian commented on Biden's visit to Saudi Arabia. He said, "The region's countries should not allow foreign powers to undermine regional cooperation and stability. We reiterate the importance of dialogue and cooperation among the countries of the region. And we believe that the people of the region should decide the region's future."<sup>(14)</sup>

During his speech at the Jeddah summit, US President Joe Biden said, "Iran's activities are destabilizing the Middle East, and we are determined to confront terrorist threats in the region, as well as to assist our regional allies in combating terrorism." He added, "We will not allow Iran to inflame tensions in the region, we will not use force to change borders, and we will not jeopardize regional freedom of navigation." He further stated, "My administration prioritizes Red Sea maritime navigation freedom, and we will strengthen air defenses and early warning systems to counter air threats, and we will never allow Iran to obtain a nuclear weapon. And we will not leave a regional void for Russia, China, or Iran to fill."<sup>(15)</sup>

The Jeddah summit's joint statement emphasized that diplomacy would be pursued to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons. The statement did, however, call for strengthened joint deterrence capabilities in response to the growing threats posed by Iran's drone program.

Iran's Foreign Ministry condemned the claims made against Tehran, asserting that the policy of Iranophobia had not stopped, and this policy had incited tensions and deepened existing crises.<sup>(16)</sup>

Despite these criticisms, Iran believes that the Jeddah summit exposed disagreements between the United States and some Arab countries and it failed to achieve Washington's objectives of persuading Arab capitals to join an anti-Iran regional alliance. As a result, Iran accelerated its efforts immediately following the summit to woo Arab countries by calling for dialogue. In this regard, Kamal Kharazi, the former Iranian foreign minister, and head of the Strategic Council for Foreign Relations, called for a regional dialogue between Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar and Turkey to resolve political and security differences.<sup>(17)</sup> This call can be construed as an Iranian attempt to keep Arab countries neutral and thwart any efforts to create a unified regional position against Tehran. Iran also seeks to ensure that the region's countries will not thwart the efforts to reach an agreement to revive the Iranian nuclear deal.

Some Iranian positions in relation to Biden's visit and the Jeddah summit were somewhat optimistic, particularly regarding the nuclear talks and the future of Iran-Saudi relations. According to some Iranian analysts, Biden's visit may provide a window of opportunity for Iran as the US president would have attempt to assuage regional concerns about Iran's nuclear program. He may



have stressed to Saudi officials that a return to the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran will not impact Saudi Arabia and relations between Riyadh and Washington may reset and return strong once again. The resumption of relations between Tehran and Riyadh is a completely independent Saudi decision that is dependent on how far Iran is committed to establishing relations based on good neighborliness and noninterference in the internal affairs of other countries. However, there is widespread belief in Iran that some international parties are attempting to impede the resumption of bilateral relations with Riyadh. As a result, there were predictions that Biden would give Riyadh the go-ahead to re-establish ties with Iran, restoring stability to the region. If this happens, Iran will benefit economically from Biden's visit, particularly in terms of oil production. A nuclear agreement with Iran will create a new energy market for the United States and Europe, contributing to a decline in energy prices.<sup>(18)</sup>

Iranian "reformist" Sadeq Zibakalam mentioned in June that Iranians are concerned about a potential war because Israel regards Iran's nuclear program as a dangerous existential threat. Iran recently reduced the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) ability to monitor its nuclear activities. As a result, it will not be surprising to see other countries join Israel in forming an anti-Iran alliance.<sup>(19)</sup> However, following the Jeddah summit, he expressed deep optimism when he summarized Biden's visit and the summit's outcomes by saying that "Washington and Riyadh absolutely do not want to engage in a confrontation with Iran."<sup>(20)</sup>

### **Tehran's Summit and the Significance of the Timing**

The trilateral summit bringing together leaders of Iran, Russia and Turkey, held in the Iranian capital Tehran on July 19, 2022, was dedicated to holding talks on the Astana process to settle the Syrian dispute. However, the timing of the summit, just two days after the conclusion of the Jeddah summit, has special significations, most notably reflecting Iranian concern about the formation of an anti-Iranian alliance or the introduction of a US blueprint on how to deal with the Iranian nuclear file and prevent Tehran's interference in regional countries. Therefore, the Tehran summit served as a counterweight to the Jeddah summit. The Iranians believe that the Iranian-Russian-Turkish axis could counteract any alliance formed by the United States and regional countries. Heshmatollah Falahatpisheh, the former head of the Iranian Parliament's Foreign Policy and National Security Committee, stated unequivocally that "any US provocation will lead to the formation of a counter-bloc." Perhaps countries that work with Russia invariably follow this course. If Russia has a strategic vision for Iran, it will find supporters rather than opponents in the country. Putin's visit to Tehran demonstrates Russia's desire to forge strategic ties in the region. As much as Biden's visit may result in the formation of an anti-Iran bloc (alliance) in the region, Putin's visit may result in the formation of counter-alliances. We will have to wait and see if the Biden administration is ready for this confrontation."<sup>(21)</sup> This statement reveals Iran's true objectives, not what was claimed by the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanani. He alleged that Tehran's trilateral summit was not a counterweight to the recent Jeddah summit.



## Conclusion

Iran expected the Jeddah summit to lead to an escalation of the rhetoric against it, and the formation of a regional alliance with the involvement of the United States to counter it. However, the summit's overall rhetoric was completely contrary to Iranian expectations. It called for peace and emphasized diplomacy and reaching out to Iran. The rational discourse apparent in the speeches of national leaders at the summit stems from the fact that the region's countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, seek to achieve common interests and foster stability rather than form alliances that are more likely than not to complicate the region's landscape.

# The Economic File

The June 2022 Economic File shed light on the major developments in Iran's economic performance, particularly analyzing the spike in the inflation rate and local currency fluctuations against the US dollar. It also discussed the cooperation agreements signed by Iran with several other countries, as well as their potential implications. Meanwhile, the July 2022 file examines Iran's economic ambitions in light of the summits held in Jeddah and Tehran. The second part of the file spotlights the potential impacts of the outcomes of the two summits on Iran's economy, as well as the scope of the benefits and negative ramifications for Iran.

## **The Economic Dimension for Iran in Light of the Summits Held in Jeddah and Tehran**

The economic dimension was apparent in the agenda of the first summit which was held in Jeddah during the visit of US President Joe Biden to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia<sup>(22)</sup> as well as in the agenda of the second summit which was held in Tehran between the presidents of Iran, Russia and Turkey.<sup>(23)</sup> It seems there was one thing in common between the timing of the two summits: the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its ramifications for the global economy — especially for energy supplies. Iran and Russia possess massive reserves of natural gas. In addition, there are several other variables impacting the global oil market such as the problems in some oil-producing countries including Iran, Venezuela and even Libya. In addition, the stalled talks to revive the nuclear deal will have ramifications for the Iranian economy, especially for Tehran's export of oil and gas.

For the aforementioned reason (energy supplies), Biden's visit to Saudi Arabia was a necessity for Washington. Biden attempted to seek alternatives to Russian/Iranian energy supplies by forging closer relationships with the Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, which has the world's second-largest oil reserves. It also has the largest share of the oil exports market (17 percent), making it the biggest oil exporter in the world.<sup>(24)</sup>

At the conclusion of the Jeddah summit, Washington's demand to increase oil output to relieve global oil supply pressures was met with Saudi reservations, with Saudi Arabia reiterating that any decision to increase oil output would be made collectively (OPEC Plus) and based on global oil supply-demand forecasts. OPEC Plus member countries are expected to meet in August amid forecasts that there will be a calculated oil output increase. However, this increase is not expected to change the current oil market equation, which will put additional pressure on the United States and its European allies.

The impact of the ongoing standoff between Russia and the West, the stalled talks to revive the nuclear deal and the Western escalation against Russia and Iran, have pushed Moscow and Tehran to pursue a parallel diplomatic approach to reach further understandings and enhance bilateral opportunities, particularly in the economic field. This is in addition to both countries pursuing multiple measures to exert counter-pressures in response to the United States' moves in the energy file and attempts to show that they are not isolated on the global stage. The Tehran summit and the economic deals reached before and during the summit occurred just a few days after Biden's visit to the region, who wanted to persuade countries to increase their energy output to mitigate the global energy crisis. Tehran and Moscow attempted to send a message that the energy crisis will not be lessened or mitigated unless they both have a role to play in the matter.

Prior to the summit — during the first months of the Ukrainian crisis — Iran sought to promote the idea that the supply of Iranian oil would be critical to mitigating the global energy crisis. This represented Tehran's bid to promote the advantages of reviving the Iranian nuclear deal. However, Iran's hopes remain elusive. Therefore, Iran sought through the summit it held with Moscow, to raise the concerns of the United States and Europe about the formation of new orientations in the energy field, by demonstrating its strong ties to Moscow. This is in addition to putting pressure on the parties to the nuclear talks to make more concessions ahead of reaching any deal.

For its part, Russia is inching closer to Iran, with Moscow aware of the mutual need to render US sanctions on their economies ineffective. Moscow is also aware of the West's increasing need to secure alternatives to its energy supplies, especially as winter approaches and given the United States' inability to pressure the Gulf states to boost their energy production. Hence, Russia has entered the Iranian oil market by signing a memorandum of understanding between Russia's Gazprom and the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), which includes \$4 billion in investments in oil and natural gas projects.<sup>(25)</sup>

Within the framework of their banking and financial cooperation, Russia and Iran aim to increase joint trade in local currencies while decreasing transactions in the US dollar. The Governor of the Central Bank of Iran Ali Salehabadi announced the start of cooperation between Iran and Russia in local currency transactions. This measure is one of the economic outcomes of Putin's visit to Tehran, as well as one of the outcomes of the Iranian Central Bank's governor's visit to Russia on July 7, 2022.<sup>(26)</sup> The two countries' banking authorities are also considering developing a "SWIFT-style" system for bank transfers, but through using local currencies and credit cards. During 2021, trade between Iran and Russia rose to \$4 billion, a 31 percent increase over the previous year.<sup>(27)</sup>

### **The Scope of Iranian Economic Benefits and Losses in Light of the Two Summits**

The outcomes of the two summits indicate that there will be expected Iranian economic benefits and losses. Given the stalled talks to revive the nuclear deal and failure to lift the economic sanctions, Tehran seeks to survive through



diversifying its options and economic relations with Russia, China and neighboring countries and limit the potential risks in case the nuclear deal is not revived. However, there are potential negative impacts of the Russian investment agreement. It is worth noting that the two countries are more rivals than cooperative friends in the field of energy. Over the past decade, Tehran has sought to find ways to circumvent US sanctions through selling oil to Beijing, which has not fully complied with US sanctions. The Ukrainian crisis has sparked some sort of competition between the Iranians and Russians over securing a bigger market share for oil, its derivatives and minerals, particularly to export to China, India, and other Asian countries. Moscow is selling its oil products at competitive prices that undermine Iranian sales. The Asian market, once an economic outlet for Iran, has become a source of threat for it. In addition to the foregoing, the signing of the investment agreement between Iran and Russia has raised several essential questions, mostly linked to how this agreement will be funded by Moscow, especially given the economic pressures it has been facing in recent months following the imposition of Western sanctions. Accordingly, there are many doubts about Gazprom's capacity to meet its obligations as stipulated under this agreement. As a result, for the time being, the agreement signed by Gazprom and the NIOC will remain merely a memorandum of understanding. Its future could be similar to the 25-year comprehensive cooperation agreement signed with China. The latter is rather ambiguous and does not constitute an actual partnership between the two countries.

Turkish mediation to help in the transportation of Russian-Ukrainian grain from besieged ports, the reported UN-supervised agreement between Russia and Ukraine to transfer grain shipments and the Iranian government's apparent siding with Russia in the recent Ukraine crisis are all possibilities that Tehran could undoubtedly benefit from. Recurrent protests in various parts of Iran over soaring prices and worsening living conditions, as well as reports that Iranian consumers are unable to secure essential goods, including food, have prompted the Iranian government to secure guaranteed grain shipments. As a result, siding with the Russians will help Iran achieve this goal.

Russia's participation in the financial exchange system may strengthen bilateral financial and banking cooperation. It should be noted, however, that this strengthening of economic/financial relations is rather deceptive and does not reflect any sort of genuine economic partnership between the two countries. This increase in trade is caused by temporary global conditions as well as the withdrawal of Western companies from Iranian and Russian markets. The level of cooperation between them will fall once the nuclear deal with Tehran is revived or Russia's war with Ukraine is resolved. Furthermore, \$4 billion is a small amount of trade between the two countries. The two countries' trade relations are insufficient to bridge the trade gap between Russia and the West, or between the latter and Iran. Iran's trade volume with Iraq is double that of its volume of trade with Russia.<sup>(28)</sup>

## Conclusion

In the context of the stalled nuclear talks and the imposition of harsh sanctions, Iran is seeking to broaden its economic options and forge economic and trade partnerships with countries that share its interests and positions. Due to US sanctions and current shifts resulting from the conflict in Ukraine and its impact on the global economic order, the Russian option is one of the more favorable options for Iran in its economic strategy. The recent Tehran summit demonstrates its desire to increase commercial and economic cooperation with Russia. Despite the fact that the two countries will secure joint benefits, there are significant differences between Iran and Russia on critical issues. Iran appears unconcerned about supplying the global market with oil and gas, putting genuine pressure on Russia, and contributing to the success of Western sanctions imposed on it as a result of its invasion of Ukraine. Additionally, there are concerns about Russia's capacity to meet its financial obligations as stipulated in the agreement it signed with the Iranian government, which could stymie cooperation between the two countries.

# The Military File

The June 2022 Military File shed light on the recent outbreak of cyberwarfare between Iran and Israel, as well as the significant shakeup within the intelligence apparatus of the IRGC. This month, Iran is bracing for the potentially disastrous consequences of failing to resurrect the nuclear deal, a scenario that appears likely. Iran has revealed that it is capable of developing a nuclear bomb, threatening enemies with a harsh and crushing response. For its part, the United States reaffirmed its bipartisan commitment to defending Israel against Iran's efforts to acquire nuclear weapons. By contrast, Iran's strategic partnership with Russia has become closer than ever before. This partnership could entail an Iranian role in the Russian war against Ukraine, though limited. According to the foregoing, this month's Military File covers the following themes: the US-Israeli announcement to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions and the Iran-Russia drone deal, particularly its implications for Moscow.

## US-Israel Joint Declaration Against Iran's Nuclear Ambitions

The key highlight of the US president's visit to Israel was the joint declaration of a bilateral "strategic partnership." It categorically spelled out the convergence of interest and action in denying Iran the possibility of achieving nuclear-weapons capability.

Signed on July 14, 2022, by US President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid, the declaration reads, "The United States stresses that integral to this pledge is the commitment never to allow Iran to acquire a nuclear weapon, and that it is prepared to use all elements of its national power to ensure that outcome."<sup>(29)</sup>

Biden pledged "steadfast commitment to preserve and strengthen Israel's capability to deter its enemies and to defend itself by itself against any threat or combination of threats." The declaration specified that "these commitments are bipartisan and sacrosanct, and that they are not only moral commitments, but also strategic commitments that are vitally important to the national security of the United States itself."

The above context further amplifies the significance of the United States' firm support for "implementing the terms of the current historic \$38 billion Memorandum of Understanding in full, which honors the United States' enduring commitment to Israel's security" besides committing "to seeking additional missile defense assistance in excess of MOU levels, in exceptional circumstances such as the hostilities with Hamas over eleven days in May 2021."



The allies launched a new Strategic High-Level Dialogue on Technology to form a bilateral technological partnership in critical and emerging technologies, as well as in areas of global concern. "This new technological partnership will be designed to boost the countries' mutual innovation ecosystems and address geostrategic challenges."

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi reacted with the threat of a "harsh and regrettable" response.<sup>(30)</sup> In a similar vein, Spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry Nasser Kanaani said in an interview, "The Zionist regime's recent threats are just psychological warfare and this regime has neither the courage nor the capability to confront Iran militarily."<sup>(31)</sup> Meanwhile, Kamal Kharrazi, a senior adviser to Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, boasted about the country's nuclear weapons capability in an interview with Al-Jazeera, "In a few days we were able to enrich uranium up to 60 percent and we can easily produce 90 percent enriched uranium ... Iran has the technical means to produce a nuclear bomb but there has been no decision by Iran to build one," he stated.<sup>(32)</sup>

Kharrazi's claim could have been downplayed as rhetoric had the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi not spoken of Iran's nuclear program "galloping ahead." Explaining the difficulties faced, he elaborated, "The bottom line is that for almost five weeks I have had very limited visibility, with a nuclear programme that is galloping ahead and, therefore, if there is an agreement, it is going to be very difficult for me to reconstruct the puzzle of this whole period of forced blindness," he told El Pais.<sup>(33)</sup>

Iran is not just nervous about the Israel-US renewed pledge but also frets over the bipartisan US Senate bill – the Iran Nuclear Weapons Capability Act of 2022 – requiring the White House to assess the dangers from Iran and evolve a strategy to counter them. The law involves the establishment of a task force to integrate intelligence from Israel and report updated assessments of Iran's nuclear capabilities every 120 days.<sup>(34)</sup>

"There is no reason why the US Congress should not receive the most up to date information about Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile activities," Senator Robert Menendez, Democrat of New Jersey said.<sup>(35)</sup>

In light of these developments, two pictures emerge: Iran is no longer even trying to hide its pursuit of nuclear weapons, and the United States supports Israel's efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation in the Middle East. Tehran's will to become a nuclear power is directly proportional to the punitive action from the countries it threatens. Since the UNSC is starkly divided on matters of high politics, the only route left for Iran is either to return to its obligation or face preventive action.

### **What Can the Iran-Russia Drone Deal Achieve for Moscow in Ukraine?**

Russia reportedly turned to Iran to acquire hundreds of drones as it enters the fifth month of the Ukraine invasion,<sup>(36)</sup> which initially began as a three-day special operation. The Russian drones have proven no match for the tactical challenge that Moscow is up against as not only have their supply lines failed but they have also proven to have poor endurance and dismal firepower.



Since the United States claimed that the two allies had reached a deal for drones, Iran was quick to deny it until the satellite imagery of one of the two purported visits of Russian officials – June 8 and July 6 – were released to the media.<sup>(37)</sup> Then, President Putin’s visit to Iran further cleared the mist as the strategic partnership entered a new phase. Iran’s media outlets are now quoting officials who express readiness to supply arms to Russia.<sup>(38)</sup>

Before analyzing the Iran-Russia deal, it is important to question what factors led to the failure of the Kremlin’s Eleron-3 and the Orlan-10. The tactical UAVs were employed for surveillance, intelligence, target-selection, and reconnaissance. They were rendered ineffective due to Ukraine’s own and foreign-supplied electronic warfare systems. Moscow’s more expensive and sophisticated Indokodets combat aerial vehicles are available in smaller numbers and the supply lines remain curtailed due to Western technological sanctions barring access to chips and advanced materials.<sup>(39)</sup> Last but not least, Russia’s loitering munitions have also proven unsuccessful in their own right due to their meager 3-kilogram payload supposing they are not subjected to electronic interference.<sup>(40)</sup> Russia used to import drones from Israel but this supply line became victim to Western sanctions imposed after its invasion and annexation of Crimea in 2014. The Kremlin had the capability to reverse engineer and improvise the imported copies of Israel’s UAVs though.<sup>(41)</sup>

Due to its multilayered ties to the West, China has shied away from Russia’s demand for arms supplies. Iran, on the other hand, remains isolated from the West, and defiant in its stratagem. Tehran’s forte in defying sanctions leaves her with fewer technological shortcomings compared to Moscow whose bid to buy Western drones through Qatar was frustrated in Italy recently.<sup>(42)</sup> It seemingly enjoys easier access to chips and other high-tech materials from India, China

and Southeast Asia through the black market. Iran's drones have proven their mettle in low-intensity conflicts in Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. It has even exported some to Venezuela, Ethiopia and Iraq besides smuggling several to its proxies in the Middle East. In June, Iran unveiled its drone factory in Tajikistan which could not have happened without Russia's consent.

Besides issues concerning supply lines, lack of chipsets, advanced materials to manufacture drones and the woes of electronic interference to guidance systems, Russia needs capable unmanned combat aircraft to locate and target the US-supplied High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) and other agile and lethal weapons in the Ukrainian arsenal. Besides, Russian ammunition and supply depots and command centers are frequently successfully attacked. Having lost over three dozen fighter jets, the Russian air force is not taking any more risks.<sup>(43)</sup> The Russian air force only relies on the Su-25 Frogfoot due to its ground support capability and sturdy airframe, hence maintenance for the drone fleet tends to be enormous which remains incomplete.<sup>(44)</sup>

Iran's UAVs have not seen an all-out conflict unlike Turkey's Bayraktar TB2, which were earlier effectively deployed against Russian systems in Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh war besides other conflicts in Libya and Syria. Iran's Mohajer-6, Shahed-129 and Shahed 191 are most likely contenders for Russia's shopping list. Tehran's arsenal of drones is extensive. So far there have been no signs of Russian troop training or the delivery of Iranian weapons systems to Moscow or to the occupied parts of Ukraine. Integrating weapons systems on such short notice amid a speedy supply of Western weapons systems to its rival will not be easy for the Russian military at all. How far can Putin's generals rely upon Iranian drones in their maiden full-scale combat against superior enemy firepower and electronic warfare systems? And, then wherever Iranian weapons systems show up, Israel will step in too not just to challenge their capabilities but also to thwart them. Tel Aviv has so far been cautious in taking a bold pro-Kyiv position but this will very likely change if Tehran's drones make it to the theater of war. Russia may use them as kamikaze drones more frequently. With even a measure of partial success, Iran's drone industry may get a boost if its UAVs perform impressively against the Western, Turkish and Ukrainian drones as well as against electronic warfare systems.

## Conclusion

Since the resumption of talks to resurrect the nuclear deal signed in 2015, Israel has repeatedly stated its opposition to the talks. It is concerned that a fragile agreement with Iran could serve as a starting point for acquiring nuclear weapons. However, the recent US president's visit to Tel Aviv and the announcement of the two countries' strategic partnership revealed their common interests, particularly to prevent Iran from acquiring the ability to produce nuclear weapons. This partnership will help to alleviate to some extent Israeli concerns about the future of Iran's nuclear program. It could also be interpreted as a green light for Israel to attack Iranian nuclear sites if the nuclear talks fail and Iran continues to reduce its nuclear commitments.



The Iranian drone deal could be a stopgap measure taken by Russia in response to the war in Ukraine. However, for the Iranian army, the deal could be a golden opportunity to test the capabilities of its drones in a real and competitive battlefield. Iranian advisers and operators will almost certainly oversee the drones' operations for some time. This is a significant victory for the besieged and isolated Iranian military force. Furthermore, the Russians and Iranians could test the tactics of their respective drone squadrons, as well as arm the drones with various types of ammunition. In the long run, this drone deal could pave the way for the development of a joint drone program. However, this is largely dependent on how events unfold in Ukraine. From a geopolitical standpoint, the consequences of siding with the invading Russian army outweigh any short-term benefits that Iran may see.

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# Arab Affairs

**A**rab Affairs discusses Iran relations with the Gulf states, Yemen, Iraq, and Syria. The Iran and Gulf file sheds light on the Jeddah Security and Development Summit and the statuesque challenges as well as Iran's reactions to the summit. As for Yemen, the file discusses how the Yemeni issue is tackled in the summit and the position of the Yemeni Presidential Leadership Council on the summit. Further, the file analyses Iraq's relations in light of six main issues: the attendance of Iraq's Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi in Jeddah summit, Iraqi crises, the roots of Sadr and Maliki disagreements, the sibilance of the timing of leaks, the implications of the leaks on the country's internal crises, finally the possible actors behind the leaks. The last part of Arab Affairs is Syria which discusses two topics: Syria and Summit of the Guarantor States of the Astana process and Jeddah summit and the security of the Syrian-Jordanian borders.



# Iran and the Gulf States

In June, the Iran and the Gulf states file addressed the arrangements of the regional countries to deal with US shifts toward the Gulf states. This followed Biden's announcement of his visit to Saudi Arabia upon the invitation of the custodian of the Two Holy Mosques. In this context, he held a meeting with the leaders of the Gulf states, Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq. This meeting was carried out amid the deadlock in the nuclear talks between Iran and the P5+1 countries. This file also dealt with the implications of the Iraqi prime minister's visit to Jeddah and Tehran.

This month's file examines the outcomes of the recent Arab-American summit entitled the "Jeddah Summit for Security and Development," which indicated the beginning of a reset of relations with the United States after years of low-level relations. The decisions of the summit highlighted the status of Iran's relations with the region's and world's countries, and the need to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the region. In June, an evident desire of the Gulf states to distance themselves from polarizing policies was apparent.

## **The Arab-US Summit and the Challenges of the Current Stage**

The Gulf states, which have always relied on the United States to act responsibly in dealing with the developments and crises facing the Gulf, perceived this summit to be a historic opportunity to articulate their collective voice more clearly to Washington and the world, and to set out their positions in the context of an international system which is facing unprecedented challenges and polarization since the end of the Cold War.

### **A Balanced Gulf Role**

During the Jeddah summit, the balanced Gulf role was evident in the speeches of the Gulf leaders. As indicated by the title of the summit, the major concern of regional countries is mainly rooted in the need to ensure security and providing an opportunity for neighboring countries to fulfil their aspirations. The US administration is aware of these concerns and has ignored them for a long time. However, the US presence at this summit was to ensure energy security, pushing back the growing Chinese and Russian influence in the region, and securing interests that serve Israel's security and its integration into the regional system. However, the leaders of regional countries took advantage of this summit to present their vision of an active role for the United States in the region, involving continued support for allies and removing the doubts of Gulf states, especially when it comes to Washington's lack of support to its traditional allies.

The Gulf states are still concerned about the dangers of Iran's regional behavior, particularly Tehran's backing of militias which have destabilized Arab countries. They also expressed their concerns about Iran's missile activity, the threats of its drones to regional security, and the faltering of the nuclear talks, thereby increasing the risk of nuclear proliferation and a nuclear arms race.

In the context of these serious concerns and the United States' pressure to draw the positions of the Gulf states to its side, the speeches of the leaders of the Gulf states reiterated the importance of the region and the challenges it faces because of Washington's preoccupation with other issues. They also expressed their desire for the United States to understand regional challenges and for it to build an alliance on the basis of trust and common interests, and to form a balanced strategic structure for regional cooperation to promote deterrence, de-escalation, and to explore ways of enhancing economic cooperation, security and development.<sup>(1)</sup>

At the Jeddah summit, the US president and the leaders of the Gulf shared their concerns about Iran's nuclear program, and their desire to reach an agreement that would spare the region of any unwanted ramifications. Their goals, however, varied. The countries of the region feel that the United States has not paid enough attention to resolving the core issue of Arabs and Muslims: the Palestinian issue, which contributes to terrorism, extremism, and racism. Hence, without solving this issue, other issues are unlikely to be resolved in the region.

Biden said at the summit that the United States is clear-eyed about the challenges in the Middle East and its capacities. He also stated that the United States' objectives are focused and achievable so that it can rebuild trust and deliver real results. Biden assured that the United States is going to remain an active partner in the Middle East as the world grows more competitive and it will not walk away and leave a vacuum to be filled by China, Russia, or Iran. He stressed that the United States would seek to build an active leadership in adherence to several principles. In accordance with these principles, the United States will work with partners to counter the threats posed by Iran and will pursue diplomacy to end the crisis related to Iran's nuclear program as Washington is committed to Tehran not possessing nuclear weapons.<sup>(2)</sup>

### **Calling on Iran for Positive Dialogue**

At the opening of the summit, His Highness Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz called on Iran to cooperate with regional countries and not interfere in the affairs of other countries. He said, "We call on Iran, as a neighboring country, with which we share religious and cultural ties, to cooperate with the countries of the region to be part of this vision, by adhering to the principles of international legitimacy, non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, cooperating with the International Atomic Energy Agency."<sup>(3)</sup> However, the Gulf discourse was not tense. The Gulf leaders emphasized their desire to have balanced relations away from polarizing policies. The President of the UAE Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed stated at the Jeddah summit, "The UAE will remain a reliable partner in the approach



to stability and prosperity, which is based on peace and development and the dissemination of its fruits in the countries of the region and the world.”(4) He also added, “the UAE’s policy in its international relations is based on balance and expanding the base of interests with the countries of the world to serve the goals of national development, peace and stability.” During his speech at the summit, the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani stressed “the need to resolve the differences in the region through dialogue based on respect for the sovereignty of states, non-interference in their internal affairs, promoting common interests, and participating in shouldering responsibilities.”(5) His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain stressed that the direct interference in the internal affairs of states is one of the most ominous current challenges and it violates the principles and rights guaranteed under international law. He emphasized that ensuring regional security and stability necessitates cooperation, solidarity and effective joint action, which are important aspirations of the peoples of the region.(6) The Crown Prince of the State of Kuwait His Highness Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al Jaber Al Sabah said that the challenges in the region necessitate more coordination, “We hope that the Jeddah summit will be a new starting point for addressing all outstanding issues of the Middle East.” He “called on Iran to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency to rid the Middle East of nuclear weapons.”(7)

### Outcomes and Iranian Responses

In response, the Iranian Foreign Ministry dismissed what it called the United States’ allegations against Iran during Biden’s visit to the region. He described them as unacceptable and baseless. It said that those claims are part of Washington’s policy of inciting sedition and tension in the region. The Iranian Foreign Ministry stated that by resorting to the failed policy of Iranophobia at the Jeddah summit, Washington seeks to create tensions and crisis in the region. The Foreign Ministry also said that Iran welcomed dialogue with neighboring countries and any regional initiatives and it expects regional countries to take constructive steps in response to Tehran’s regional initiatives regarding cooperation.(8) It should be mentioned here that Iran has tried hard to promote an initiative called the Hormuz Security Initiative (2019) which is based on the following main principles: non-interference in the affairs of others, non-aggression, commitment to energy security, and referring to international law. Regional countries believe that the contents of this announced initiative completely contradict Iran’s behavior as Tehran seeks to control the countries of the region and interfere in their affairs. However, there are no grounds to believe this initiative will be accepted. Therefore, the Gulf states have not been concerned about this initiative.

On the occasion of the tripartite summit of Russia, Iran, and Turkey in Tehran as part of the Astana track, Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani said that the tripartite summit does not conflict with the Jeddah summit or any other initiatives by regional countries. Regarding relations with regional countries, the Iranian spokesman said, “We have received positive messages recently from Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Jordan to improve bilateral

relations.”<sup>(9)</sup> These remarks appears to be in response to the positive messages conveyed at the Jeddah summit, which included de-escalation and a balanced discourse. These remarks also indicate that the Iranian government is trying to separate between its interests with the countries of the region and its ongoing conflict with the West.

## Conclusion

In spite of its modest political outcomes, the Jeddah summit represented an important juncture. However, just as the American side resumed its interest in the region, the Iranian political system, which bets on the United States’ withdrawal from the region, has become concerned. The speeches of Arab leaders who partook in the summit were very clear and they dispelled misgivings about the alleged conspiratorial role of Arab countries toward Iran. Therefore, the Iranian response shifted toward Israel and attacked its agreements with the United States.

The Jeddah summit’s outcomes, with its focus on security and development, indicate that security is an important demand which Tehran and Washington must consider as a basis for cooperation that will lead to a working relationship with regional countries in the next stage. Although the messages of calm and dialogue exchanged between Iran and the Gulf states may reflect a state of relative calm during the next stage, the Iranian interventionist role in the Arab countries will remain as pressure cards. Therefore, Iran will continue its destabilizing regional operations and will seek to extend its strategic depth in the region. Therefore, reaching an important settlement with Iran may seem unlikely in the short term. However, the important initiatives by the Gulf states to enhance the independence of their decisions, end polarizing policies, increase their deterrence capabilities, enhance solidarity and integration between Arab countries and extend their renewed messages of cooperation with Iran will make Tehran reconsider its calculations which have long been based on false assumptions about the Gulf states and have caused chaos and a decline in development indicators in many regional countries, including Iran itself.

# Iran and Yemen

The June 2022 file discussed the implications of the tour of the head of Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council to a number of regional countries, and the Houthi militia's ongoing war on Yemeni identity by establishing summer centers to indoctrinate children. The July 2022 file addresses the references to Yemen at the Jeddah summit by Saudi Arabia, the United States and a number of Arab countries. With all its humanitarian, economic and political files, the Yemeni issue was a priority for the leaders participating in the summit. The outcomes of the summit were welcomed by Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council because they are crucial to fulfilling the Yemeni people's aspirations for peace and development. The Jeddah summit gave international and diplomatic impetus to finding a political solution to the Yemeni crisis. This was present in the visions of all the leaders taking part in the summit and their emphasis on the need to maintain the military truce and build upon this in the future to reach a comprehensive political solution. Meanwhile, the Jeddah summit showed its support to Yemen's legitimate government represented by the Presidential Leadership Council and condemned the behavior of the Iranian-backed Houthi militia, which is a stumbling block to achieving peace and development in Yemen. The file also discusses the compatibility of Houthi positions with Iranian positions and orientations toward the Jeddah summit and its outcomes.

## The Critical Subject of Yemen at the Jeddah Summit

The Yemeni file was a priority for the leaders who participated in the Jeddah summit and at the bilateral meetings held between the head of Yemen's Presidential Leadership Council Rashad al-Alimi and the leaders and officials of the countries taking part in the summit. The summit resulted in the development of Arab-American approaches on the course of the political process in Yemen and the Iranian role impeding the political solution in the country, and one that threatens the stability of the region and international sea lanes, especially the Bab al-Mandab Strait. The leaders who participated in the summit reaffirmed their support to the Presidential Leadership Council and vowed to continue the Yemeni-Yemeni peace talks based on the three references previously outlined, including UN Security Council Resolution 2216, which was emphasized by the Saudi crown prince. In this regard, during his speech at the summit, His Royal Highness Prince Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud stated, "As an extension of the kingdom's vision to achieve security and stability in the region, Saudi Arabia has supported all efforts to reach a Yemeni-Yemeni political solution as per the three references. The kingdom has also



made efforts to consolidate the current truce, and we will continue to provide humanitarian aid to the brotherly Yemeni people.”<sup>(10)</sup>

The US president also welcomed the truce in Yemen by saying that “In Yemen, working closely with Saudi Arabia, Oman, the UAE, and the UN, we forged a truce that is now in its 15th week.”<sup>(11)</sup> He also stressed that the United States will not allow regional powers to risk the freedom of navigation in the Bab al-Mandab Strait. On the other hand, Bahraini King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa stressed the importance of stability in the Middle East, which has suffered from difficult political, security and economic conditions as well as dangerous challenges. He also underlined the need to reach a political settlement to the Yemeni crisis and to continue humanitarian and development support. Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi stated that Iraq supports the Yemeni armistice as a fruitful beginning to end the Yemeni crisis and restore stability, and support international and regional initiatives aimed at ending the conflict.<sup>(12)</sup>

### **The Position of the Presidential Leadership Council on the Jeddah Summit**

The head of Yemen’s Presidential Leadership Council Rashad al-Alimi expressed his gratitude to his Arab brothers who participated in the Jeddah summit for their significant interest in the Yemeni file and commitment to meet the aspirations of the Yemeni people for peace and development in their country. He also called on all Yemeni political elements to come together around the Yemeni leadership to restore all state institutions and confront Iran’s destabilizing role in Yemen and the region. Alimi stated that “this interest in our just cause, including the emphasis of those summits on the national and international references for a comprehensive solution in Yemen, is a real test for the Yemeni political elements to capture the moment, come together around the goal of restoring the state, and strengthening the internal front as a top priority in the face of destructive Iranian ambitions.”<sup>(13)</sup>

Yemen’s Deputy Information Minister Abdulbasit al-Qaidi stated that the support of the leaders who participated in the summit to the Presidential Leadership Council and their emphasis on the need for the Houthi militia’s serious return to the negotiating table based on the three references are the most important outcomes of the Jeddah summit in relation to the Yemeni crisis.<sup>(14)</sup>

On the other hand, many observers argue that the US commitment to supporting a political settlement in Yemen is quite positive unless Washington does this to reap internal political gains, i.e., in the elections, or any other unannounced political goals — it is worth mentioning that the US position on Yemen was limited to welcoming the truce and extending it. Further, Washington did not set forth a clear and direct overview of the causes of the Yemeni crisis and the ways to end it; i.e., Iran’s support to the Houthi militia against the legitimate government. Other analysts also believe that the United States’ emphasis on the armistice and calling for its extension is a ploy and means to support the Democratic Party in the upcoming midterm elections, and that the party is trying to promote the armistice as an achievement for the Biden administration. They also think that calling for extending the armistice

is part of Biden's electoral promises to stop the war in Yemen, and in line with the Democratic Party's usual approach, which entails the avoidance of taking clear and conclusive positions. Some analysts suggest that the Yemeni crisis may take a different course after the US midterm elections in November unless the Democratic Party takes a more resolute position against the Yemeni crisis. Foremost among these decisions is to add the Houthi militia to the US terror list.

### **The Compatibility of the Houthi Position With Iranian Approaches**

The leaders who participated in the Jeddah summit expressed their interest in the Yemeni crisis, emphasized the need for continued support of all the humanitarian, relief and development projects for the Yemeni people and called to consolidate the military truce aimed primarily at sparing the blood of the people and building upon this in the future as part of the Yemeni-Yemeni political solution. This solution can be linked to the development and humanitarian file that meets the aspirations of the Yemeni people. On the other side, the Houthi militia dismissed the announcement of extending the military truce a day after the summit was held. Meanwhile, the so-called Supreme Political Council of the Houthi militia rejected the outcomes of the summit in relation to Yemen. The militia claimed that these outcomes affect the sovereignty and security of Yemen.<sup>(15)</sup>

The Houthi militia's dismissal of the summit outcomes related to the Yemeni crisis was due to the fact that the consensus and support by the national leaders who partook in the gathering to the Presidential Leadership Council represents a denunciation of its coup against the legitimate government and its exclusionary policies against all Yemeni components, including the Presidential Leadership Council, the only legitimate representative of Yemen and the Yemeni people. Therefore, the Houthis outlined their own disingenuous vision of peace through which it aims to exploit the peace talks and humanitarian files. The Houthis aims in this regard to make Yemen's neighboring countries and the international community accept the militia as a competitive party to the internationally recognized legitimate government. In a statement after the summit, the Houthi militia revealed its revolutionary vision for a political solution in Yemen to present itself as the exclusive representative of the Yemeni people. Meanwhile, the Houthis called on regional and world powers to stop supporting the legitimate government economically and militarily. The Houthi militia "condemned and denounced" the visit of the US president. Therefore, Iran's position was compatible with the positions of all its proxy militias in the region.<sup>(16)</sup>

In response to the Jeddah summit, the Houthi militia increased its military violations of the truce during the period of the summit. The Yemeni army spokesman indicated that Houthi violations increased on various fronts from July 15 to July 16, 2022, coinciding with the summit. The army statement indicated that the Houthi militia committed 188 violations on the Hodeidah, Taiz, Hajjah, Dhalea, Saada, Al-Jawf and Marib fronts.<sup>(17)</sup>

## Conclusion

The Arab leaders who participated in the Jeddah summit expressed great interest in achieving peace and stability in Yemen, rejecting war and violence and calling for an end to the suffering of the Yemeni people. They asserted the need to continue peace efforts and Yemeni-Yemeni talks based on a comprehensive political solution in Yemen, namely the Gulf Initiative, the decisions reached through national dialogue, and the relevant international resolutions, especially UN Security Council Resolution 2216. The positions of the Arab leaders also obliged the Houthi militia to implement the provisions of the existing armistice in line with the UN declaration, and open the main roads to Taiz city given the great support of the regional countries to the Presidential Leadership Council. The condemnation of the Houthi violations against the Yemeni people by the leaders of the summit demonstrated its isolation, with the militia taking the side of Iran and serving its expansionist agenda.



# Iran and Iraq

The June 2022 file discussed the circumstances and objectives of Sadr's withdrawal from the entire Iraqi political process, and the future prospects of the Sadrist Movement in the country's political arena. The July 2022 file reviews the implications of Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi's participation in the Jeddah summit on Iraq's domestic crises, the crisis surrounding the audio leaks attributed to former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki; their contents, timing, significance, the likely parties behind the leaks, and the repercussions for Iraq's domestic crises.

## Kadhimi's Participation in the Jeddah Summit and Iraq's Domestic Crises

Kadhimi's participation in the Jeddah summit reflected the shift in regional and international perceptions toward Iraq as a pivotal country in the Middle East. This is because of Kadhimi's tireless efforts to transform Iraq from an arena for settling accounts to one that settles crises based on dialogue, and from a weak state that depends on Iran into one that has a significant degree of independence and maintains a balance in its foreign relations, enabling it to reenter the Arab fold and remove itself from Iran's sphere of influence.

While Kadhimi participated in the Jeddah summit, which contributed to creating newly emerging regional and international realities, Iraq is experiencing a complex political stalemate because of the coalition's failure to form the next government. The coalition is divided between alliances supporting the formation of a national majority government that does not include the State of Law Coalition led by Nouri al-Maliki and shifting Iraq toward the path of state-building such as the Sadrist bloc, and those opposing any change to the traditional consensual approach and want Maliki to be part of the next government such as the Iran-backed Coordination Framework.

The developments that took place in light of the withdrawal of the Sadrist bloc's representatives from the Parliament, and the Coordination Framework's subsequent emergence as the largest bloc further complicated the nomination of a new prime minister who would move Iraq toward the path of statehood as Kadhimi has done. The Coordination Framework put forward the former leader of the Islamic Dawa Party Mohammad Shia al-Sudani as a candidate for the next government, but his candidacy was rejected by the Sadrists. This meant Kadhimi would continue as Iraq's prime minister.

Given the recent the developments, Sudani would face formidable challenges that would prevent him from forming a cabinet. The Sadrist Movement sent signals about its rejection to Sudani without announcing it officially. Many of

Sadr's supporters demonstrated in front of Sudani's house and stormed the Parliament and the Green Zone on July 27 in protest of his nomination, which prompted Kadhim to call on the demonstrators to immediately withdraw from the Parliament building.

Maliki appeared carrying a machine gun in the Green Zone while he was surrounded by heavily armed fighters, indicating his concern of potentially being assassinated after his alleged conversations were released. Maliki expressed his dissatisfaction about the nomination of Sudani because he was formerly a member of the Dawa Party and the State of Law Alliance and a minister in his government (2006-2014). Sudani's nomination was made in the wake of the meeting of the Coordination Framework's leading figures, including Hadi al-Amiri and Qais al-Khazali in the former's house. He was nominated as prime minister in 2019, but was rejected.

### **The Contents of the Leaks and Sadr's Stance**

The Shiite alliances clashed over the nomination of the next prime minister. A conflict continues to rage among the poles of the Shiite house against the backdrop of the leaked audio recordings attributed to Maliki. The recordings were made in the presence of Maliki's senior aides and included a discussion of a plan to attack Sadr. The recordings were released by Ali Fadel on Twitter, an Iraqi residing in the United States. The first leak was released on July 13, and the last on July 30, 2022.

#### **The Contents of the Leaks**

The leaked recordings amounted to "insults and treason" not only against Sunni and Kurdish figures but also against Maliki's fellow Shiites. The details are discussed as follows:(18)

-The insults against the Sadrists: Maliki accused Sadr of dozens of charges that risked his popularity, calling him a coward, a murderer and ignorant. He claimed that Sadr implemented the British and Kurdish projects to empower the Sunnis through Massoud Barzani, whom Maliki accused of scheming to pave the way for the Sunnis to rule Iraq. He accused Sadr of corruption by saying that he has 2,000 fighters in Samarra, but they receive the financial payout of 12,000 fighters. In addition, he called Sadr's supporters cowards and indicated his intention of sparking an internal war by saying that Iraq is on the verge of a devastating war that no one can survive unless the Sadr-Halbousi-Barzani project is defeated.

■ The insults against the Coordination Framework: Maliki's closest allies in the Coordination Framework, which his coalition is part of, such as Hadi al-Amiri and Qais Khazali who are close to Iran, were also criticized and insulted by questioning the framework's ability to protect the confidentiality of his meetings. He said that all the framework's meetings are infiltrated and reported to Parliament Speaker Mohammad al-Halbousi who is a Sadr ally, and the Kurdistan Democratic Party. This leaked content will affect Maliki's future within the Coordination Framework.

■ The insults against the PMF: Maliki said, “Although I worked really hard to turn the PMF into an army similar to the IRGC, its leaders only care about money and gains.” This amounts to corruption charges against the PMF leaders, notably Faleh al-Fayyad, which will impact Maliki’s future relations with the PMF.

■ The insults against Kadhimi: Maliki undermined Sadr and even questioned his government’s abilities to achieve security and protect Maliki’s supporters. He said, “I told Kadhimi that I do not trust the army or the police. I and my followers will defend ourselves. We have drones, armored vehicles, tanks and are ready to fight.” Maliki’s appearance with a machine gun in the Green Zone while he was surrounded with fighters is proof enough of the authenticity of the leaks. Maliki insulted all figures of the Shiite alliances, but the greatest amount of abuse was heaped on Sadr due to their growing differences over the party that has more influence in managing the Shiite scene and in Iraq’s internal and external orientations. This, therefore, would end Maliki’s political future.

### **Sadr’s Stance**

In the immediate aftermath of the leaks, Sadr called on Maliki to resign from politics, or to present himself to the judiciary. He called on his supporters to exercise restraint and to disregard the leaks. He called for a “unified Friday” during which he set out a roadmap comprising 11 conditions including the dissolution of the armed factions operating outside the state, the prevention of any former political figures from participating in the next government, holding corrupt officials accountable, containing the proliferation of arms, reorganizing the Popular Mobilization Forces and eliminating the undisciplined members.<sup>(19)</sup> However, Iran’s allies believe such conditions are farfetched. If they resort to giving up on the nomination of Maliki, can they give up the most important and influential pressure card in their hands in the Iraqi arena: their arms?

Due to the successive leaks in which Sadr and his supporters were violently threatened, coinciding with the Coordination Framework’s nomination of Sudani as prime minister without considering any of Sadr’s demands, the latter dismissed Maliki’s call for reconciliation and to end their rivalry. Sadr’s supporters took to the streets to express their anger at the insults, and even to reject Sudani, because he is nominated by the Coordination Framework. The leaks are a fundamental opportunity for the Sadrist Movement to close the door on Maliki’s efforts to control the office of the prime minister, and the direction of the political process in Iraq, and lessen his weight within the Shiite house.

### **The Background of the Sadr-Maliki Conflict**

The conflict between Sadr and Maliki is mainly over the leadership position of the Shiite house, achieving greater clout, holding the strongest cards in the Shiite equation, and over Iraq’s internal and external orientations. Sadr wants to shift Iraq toward state sovereignty and independence and seeks to achieve a balance in foreign relations. In contrast, Maliki adheres to an Iranian agenda to keep Iraq within Tehran’s sphere of influence and to prevent its return to the Arab fold. The disputes between the two have witnessed several stages, namely:



■ A stage dates back to Maliki's two terms when he used an exclusionary policy against the Sadrists and launched a fierce military campaign against them in 2008, known as the "Knights' Attack." As a result, many Sadrists were arrested and killed. This explains Sadr's fierce opposition to giving Maliki a second term in 2012. Relations with Maliki were further strained during his second term.

■ In 2014, relations became tense because Sadr held Maliki responsible for ISIS's control over large areas of Iraq, and the deterioration of the security and economic conditions in the country. Therefore, his supporters strongly objected to giving Maliki a third term which he aspired for. They instead supported Haider al-Abadi to be Iraq's next prime minister.

■ In 2019, disputes broke out again when Sadr announced his support for the protest movement against Iranian influence and called for a strong, independent, cross-sectarian Iraq away from foreign agendas, especially the Iranian one. This was contrary to the orientations of Maliki, the closest ally of Iran. During his term, Maliki established the sectarian quota and spread sectarian practices across the country.

■ The disputes increased as the Sadrist bloc ranked first in the 2021 elections, while the Iranian-backed alliances lost heavily. Sadr strongly rejects the formation of a consensual government which would include Maliki.

### The Timing and Implications of the Leaked Recordings

The audio recordings were released amid a time of grave political complexity, manifested in the parliamentary crisis over the failure to form a government. The two Kurdish parties: the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Democratic Party differ over the candidate for the presidency, while the Coordination Framework and the Sadrist bloc differ over the candidate for prime minister, the mechanism of government formation and its nature, whether it should be sectarian or national in outlook. The recordings were also leaked against the backdrop of increasing popular tensions in Iraq because of the electricity and water crises, unemployment and rising corruption as well as escalating divisions within the Shiite house. The leaks indicate that Maliki is probably convinced that there will be an intra-Shiite war to resolve the impasse in the relationship with the Sadrist Movement, as he spoke of a dangerous plan to ignite an open confrontation with Sadr and his Sunni and Kurdish allies. This plan is based on mobilizing armed factions to resolve the situation in Iraq by force in Maliki's favor.

After the release of these audio recordings, Maliki's desired return to the fore seems highly improbable, especially after he insulted his closest allies in the Coordination Framework and is now considered an outcast at home as well as outside Iraq. This is due to the fact that Maliki's policies during his two previous terms had weakened the role of the Shiites in Iraq and his loss of popular support against the backdrop of his sectarian practices against the Sunnis and Kurds, and even more importantly, against his fellow Shiites: the Sadrists. In addition, his former policies are the fundamental cause of the disastrous state of affairs in Iraq. Therefore, his return to the fore poses a threat to the Shiites

themselves since his return may deepen the conflict among the Shiite alliances which may lead to a war.

### **The Repercussions of the Leaks on Iraq's Internal Crises**

With these leaks insulting many Shiite and non-Shiite figures, the already troubled Shiite landscape since the 2021 elections is becoming increasingly complex. This was clearly illustrated when Sadr's supporters took to the streets on July 30, 2022 in outrage against the audio recordings attributed to Maliki, which included ideas and plans about starting an internal war and killing Sadr and the candidate of the Coordination Framework to form the next government. The Sadrist stormed the Parliament and announced an open sit-in, threatening to unleash a Shiite-Shiite clash inside Iraq, especially after the Coordination Framework called on its supporters to take to the streets, as the majority of parties have weapons. The destabilization in Iraq would lead to:

- Undermining the efforts to form a new government.
- Keeping the Kadhimi government in power.
- Adversely affecting the cohesion of the Coordination Framework alliances.
- Disrupting Sadr's ability to counter his rivals in the Coordination Framework.
- Eliminating any chance to nominate Maliki as prime minister and even adversely affecting his political future.

### **The Likely Parties Behind the Leaks**

A few days before the leaks scandal, media reports revealed that Iran, through its ambassador to Iraq, called on the leaders of the Coordination Framework to nominate an acceptable person internally and externally as the next prime minister, and that it rejects any attempts by the Coordination Framework to destabilize the Iraqi situation and the street as well as the regional and international spheres in case it nominated an unacceptable person. During this period, members of the Coordination Framework parliamentarians frequently appeared on Iraqi television to justify Maliki's possible nomination.<sup>(20)</sup>

According to Iraqi journalist Bassem al-Shara, internal and external actors believe that Maliki is the root cause of the crisis by seeking to remove the rest of the political components of the Shiite house, especially the Sadrist Movement after its lawmakers resigned from Parliament. The journalist also disclosed reports indicating that Iran is behind the leaks because they were released by one of the closest individuals to Maliki who was talking to him in the recordings to deprive him of the opportunity of forming a government that might lead Iraq into further chaos.<sup>(21)</sup> Therefore, some believe that the visit of Quds Force Commander Ismail Qaani to Iraq was to emphasize the nomination of a person who is internally and externally acceptable.

The nomination of Maliki is not in Iran's best interest at this time. As stated above, Iran recognizes that the nomination of Maliki will exacerbate the political situation in Iraq because Iran's interest lies in having a stable Iraq that will help in alleviating the economic sanctions imposed on it, since it is an economic outlet to circumvent the sanctions through trade. Therefore,

the appointment of an acceptable figure internally and externally is in Iran's interest, which is not possible with Maliki's nomination. Other observers of Iraqi affairs also believe that Iran's allies are behind these leaks to stifle the chances of nominating Maliki as prime minister.

### Conclusion

The Iraqi landscape will witness further complexity following the leaks crisis which will likely shape the future Iraqi landscape. The Sadrists' control of the Parliament building and their announcement of an open sit-in, and the Coordination Framework's call for its supporters to take to the streets highlight the prevailing political uncertainty. Therefore, the Iraqi crisis is open to all possibilities from achieving consensus on an acceptable candidate who is agreeable to the Sadrist Movement, which has become the wild card in the Shiite equation, the dissolution of the Parliament and the call for new elections, as well as the outbreak of an intra-Shiite clash, which would be catastrophic for Iraq, with its consequences unlikely to be contained.



# Iran and Syria

The Syria-Iran file in June 2022 addressed three axes: the new Iranian position on the possible Turkish military operation in Syria and the implications of this position, the Israeli strike on Damascus International Airport and the messages conveyed by this strike, and the Iranian motives for establishing a rapprochement between Hamas and Damascus.

During July 2022, the exacerbation of relations continued whether because of the repercussions of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis or the prospective Turkish military operation in northern Syria. The Syrian crisis was discussed at the Jeddah Security and Development Summit and the Tehran summit held between the guarantor states of the Astana process. The two summits take up a big part of the Syrian file in the month of July.

## Syria and the Summit of the Guarantor States of the Astana Process

On July 19, 2022, Tehran hosted the seventh meeting of the presidents of the guarantor states of the Astana process. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi hosted his Russian and Turkish counterparts Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan. It was the first presidential summit in three years to discuss a number of issues including the Syrian political settlement and the return of Syrian refugees to their homes.

Although the Syrian file was purportedly the core issue of the tripartite summit, as well as attempts to resolve the outstanding issues between the three countries, the timing of the summit and its context reveal its hidden goals and objectives. It took place amid an altered international and regional context, against the backdrop of the Russian-Ukrainian war and the escalation of the Russian-Western conflict. Meanwhile, international attention turned toward the Middle East to resolve the energy and Iranian nuclear files. US President Joe Biden visited the region, and Saudi Arabia hosted a summit that included the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Egypt, Jordan and Iraq. In addition, there was talk about creating a roadmap for regional security, military, and political cooperation. However, regional concerns about the future of the Iranian nuclear program and Tehran's regional ambitions were eased.

The tripartite summit in Tehran coincided with Turkey's declared intention to carry out a military operation inside northern Syria aimed at establishing a buffer zone and eliminating the growing presence of the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) on the border areas of Turkey. However, these Turkish plans were opposed internationally and did not receive an obvious response even from the Astana process parties for many reasons. By attending this summit, Erdogan sought to secure a declared and clear Iranian and Russian

position about Turkey's military operation, and distance Ankara from any possible confrontation with Russian or Syrian government forces or with pro-Iranian militias.

Since Turkey announced its plan to carry out a military operation, the Iranian position initially fluctuated when Tehran explicitly condemned this operation, however, later it showed some leniency by expressing its understanding of Turkish security concerns. During his talks with Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu in Ankara on June 27, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian emphasized, "Turkey's security concerns in Syria must be addressed fully and permanently," confirming that Iran "understands very well Turkey's security concerns in Syria and the need for a military operation at the same time."<sup>(22)</sup> On the other hand, Russia did not adopt a clear position on Turkey's prospective operation, but the Kremlin stated that it is against any fresh Turkish attack, and warned that it would lead to escalation and destabilization. In this regard, the Russian special envoy for Syria Alexander Lavrentiev stated that Russia will not clash with Turkey and that the Turkish army can control the area it will strike, but the consequences are hard to predict.<sup>(23)</sup>

In addition to the vague Iranian-Russian position on the prospective Turkish military operation, the signs of competition and indirect escalation dominated the interrelated interests of Iran, Turkey and Russia in Syria and Iraq, as evident especially before and after the tripartite summit in Tehran. Direct and indirect differences prevail over Russia-Turkey relations, especially after the latter expressed agreement in principle to Finland and Sweden joining NATO. This resulted in Russian strikes on Idlib escalating, and Turkey responded by deciding to close its airspace to Russian aircraft, thereby restricting the movement of Russian forces to and from Syria.

The summit was held by Russia and Iran to maintain the status quo on the Syrian landscape. Both parties anticipate challenges in the regional arena, especially the new equations emerging in the aftermath of Biden's visit to the region. One of these equations is related to Jordanian and Israeli concerns about the developments in the Syrian arena, particularly in regard to the growing Iranian role in this arena against the backdrop of Moscow reducing its presence in Syria. The Tehran summit was preceded by Iran's diplomatic efforts, the most prominent of which was the visit of Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian to Ankara and then to Damascus. He sought to mediate between the Syrian and Turkish governments in regard to the prospective Turkish operation in northern Syria and to secure a winning political card through reconciling the two governments. Following these visits, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi phoned Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to explore ways to develop cooperation between the two countries.<sup>(24)</sup>

Tehran must forge limited approaches and understandings to serve its interests in the Syrian file. The Jerusalem Declaration, which was released during Biden's visit to Tel Aviv, may exacerbate tensions between Tel Aviv and Tehran in Syria during the next stage. Meanwhile, Israel showed its indifference to any fresh coordination between Russia and Iran during Putin's visit to Tehran, especially regarding the Syrian file. Israel may attempt to test the level

of possible understandings of the two parties during the next stage, given the fact that Tel Aviv has stated that it may resort to the military option to address Iran's escalation as the latter tirelessly develops its nuclear program and takes steps to enhance its military and missile capabilities which Tel Aviv believes are directed against Israel. In light of the international isolation of Moscow and the West's growing sanctions against it, Russia aims to strengthen its convergence with Iran through the Syrian file. Russia's behavior implicitly sends warning messages to influential regional countries, including Israel, to force them to reconsider their positions on the Ukrainian war.

In the context of these intertwined and contradictory interests, and as a result of the complexities between the three countries in particular and across the region in general, several results and indicators emerged from the Tehran summit. Prominent among these was the fact that the final statement of the summit did not differ from the previous ones. It was too broad and ambiguous in order to serve the narrative and objectives of the three countries separately. The Iranian-Russian alignment was also apparent in their joint declaration which rejected the prospective Turkish operation. In addition, the rhetoric of the Iranian leadership was harsh toward the planned Turkish operation because of concerns over Turkey's growing influence in Syria, undermining Tehran's plans, and complicating its presence and political influence in Syria. One of the most important results of this summit was its failure to progress in finding a solution to the Syrian file. However, the summit was an occasion to develop bilateral relations. The bilateral meetings of the three presidents resulted in several achievements and understandings in files other than the Syrian file, such as strengthening political relations, military cooperation, and signing many economic agreements.

### **The Jeddah Summit and the Security of the Syrian-Jordanian Borders**

The speech of Jordan's King Abdullah II at the Jeddah Summit for Security and Development voiced many important points about Jordan's priorities in particular and the region's in general. He stated that his country continues to host more than 1 million Syrian refugees, providing them with various humanitarian and health services. He indicated that Jordan is encountering renewed security risks on its borders, mainly by thwarting attempts to smuggle drugs and weapons, which have become a major threat to the entire region. He reiterated the centrality of the Palestinian issue in the region and said that to ensure the success of the regional partnerships of the assembled leaders, any economic cooperation must include the Palestinian National Authority. He stated that it is important to reach a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestine conflict on the basis of a two-state solution because there can be no security, stability or prosperity in the region without a solution guaranteeing the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.<sup>(25)</sup>

Days after the summit, the Jordanian king reiterated Iran's role and its security threats to Jordan. He said that his country faces regular attacks on its border from militias associated with Iran. He expressed hope for a change



in the behavior of Iran. He spoke again about drugs and arms smuggling operations and the need for an “Arab institutional defense system to counter common sources of threats.”<sup>(26)</sup>

The issues that the Jordanian king spoke about overlap with the interests of many countries. With regard to Iran he explained that some issues, specifically Syrian refugees, are directly related to Iran’s role in the Syrian arena. Assad’s army and Iran’s IRGC and proxy militias have carried out and still undertake military operations, displacing millions of Syrians who are forced to seek refuge in neighboring countries, including Jordan. The solution to the refugee problem is linked to the return of political stability to Syria, which will be hard to attain while Iran continues its policies in the country and the continuous rejection of various initiatives to end the crisis by the Assad regime.

The same situation is equally true for the drugs and arms smuggling plaguing Jordan in recent years. Iran is also involved in this issue. The International Institute for Iranian Studies (Rasanah) previously published a report on the Iranian role in facilitating drug trafficking across the Jordanian border. These drugs originate from Hezbollah-controlled areas in Lebanon and some of them are now produced in Syria after the outbreak of the Syrian crisis. Drugs are smuggled from Syria to the Jordanian border with the support of Iranian militias and leaders inside the Assad regime which depend on drug trafficking as a source of income in light of the economic crisis and the sanctions it suffers from. The inhabitants of the border areas are exploited to smuggle drugs into Jordan and neighboring countries. Drug smuggling seems to be part of a strategy aimed at flooding the societies of regional countries with drugs to destabilize their social security, and establish relations between militias, smuggling networks and criminal gangs so that they can coordinate to enact terror operations against them in the future.<sup>(27)</sup>

By raising the slogan of “Security and Development,” the Jeddah summit reflected the awareness of regional leaders that stability necessitates cooperation and respecting the interests of all countries. The issues raised by the Jordanian king, reflecting the priorities of his country, as well as of others such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, will be part of the negotiating agenda with Iran at the regional level if Tehran wants to cooperate seriously with the countries of the region and start a new chapter of relations with them. In this context, the Jeddah summit has contributed to a major shift in the perspectives of the Gulf countries, led by Saudi Arabia, particularly in terms of their international relations. Their statements represent a departure from the polarizing policies that prevailed in the past, still pursued by the major powers: the United States, Russia and China. On the regional level, Iran is the only country that still adopts the logic of polarization despite all the positive signs following the Jeddah summit when Riyadh confirmed that the doors of dialogue with it are still open to reaching settlements that serve the countries of the region, and certainly the interests of Saudi Arabia.

## Conclusion

The Tehran summit revealed Iran's growing pivotal role in the Syrian file. Besides the tripartite summit on its soil, Tehran sought to benefit from the new realities resulting from international and regional developments and to find common ground to reach understandings with the Russian and Turkish parties. Tehran adopted a more prominent position than that of Moscow on its objection to the planned Turkish operation, based on the geopolitical status that Tehran achieved in Syria during the years after 2011 and its strong position in the country in light of Russia's preoccupation with the war against Ukraine.

The differences between the Iranian-Russian and Turkish positions on Ankara's planned military operation indicates an upcoming escalation in northern Syria between the three parties, unless mutual understandings are reached or partial concessions are made between the parties. In addition to the possible escalation of conflict between Iran, Russia and Turkey in Syria, the developments in southern Syria and the United States' crisis with Russia may turn Syria into an arena of confrontation between the latter two countries in the near future.

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# International Affairs

**I**nternational Affairs for July 2022 sheds light on Iran's relations with the United States and Europe. As for Iran-US relations, the file discusses three main topics: the Jerusalem Declaration and US-Israeli coordination on Iran, the Jeddah summit to reassure allies, and the Tehran summit to counterbalance recent US moves. As for Iran-Europe relations, the file reviews the controversial Belgian prisoner swap legislation and rising European tensions over the future of the nuclear talks.



# Iran and the United States

The June file shed light on the Doha talks which took place in late June 2022 to revive the nuclear talks in Vienna — stalled since March. The Doha talks did not lead to decisive results as Iran was waiting for the outcomes of Biden's tour to the Middle East from July 13 to July 17, 2022. Iran was on Biden's agenda when he visited the Palestinian territories and Saudi Arabia. Washington aims to make some regional arrangements to retain its ties with its traditional allies and regain its lost influence amid the current international developments. Moreover, Washington is concerned about the growing competition with China and Russia in the Middle East; a region that holds great significance on the international stage. Biden included Iran in his agenda as it represents a serious concern for Washington and regional countries — given Tehran's policies and belligerent behavior in the region, as well as its desire to undermine Washington's influence, its shift toward the East, its position on the Ukraine war, the nuclear talks stalling in Vienna, and escalating tensions with regional powers.

As for July, the file examines the impact of Biden's significant visit to the region on Washington's thorny issues with Iran, discussing three main topics: the Jerusalem Declaration and US-Israel coordination on Iran; the Jeddah summit and reassuring Washington's allies; and the Tehran summit and counterbalancing Washington's moves.

## The US Declaration and US-Israel Coordination on Iran

Despite Biden's talk of the "intimate" nature of relations between his country and Israel, Tel Aviv being his first point of call on his Middle Eastern tour and his commitment to preserve Israel's security, the US president did not give up on his diplomatic approach to tackle Iran's nuclear file. He affirmed his adherence to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and rejected the request of Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett to set a deadline for the nuclear talks in Vienna and to draw a redline that if crossed by Iran, Washington will change its position on the talks and opt for other options.<sup>(1)</sup>

To reassure Israel, the Jerusalem Declaration affirmed the United States' commitment that it will never allow Iran to possess nuclear weapons and it will utilize all its national capabilities to ensure this end. Further, Biden reiterated that the IRGC will remain on the United States' Foreign Terrorist Organizations list even though this Iranian led to the collapse of the current phase of diplomacy.<sup>(2)</sup>

The two sides, Washington and Tel Aviv, discussed the dangers posed by Iran and methods to enhance joint capabilities to address Tehran's military and



security threats and to support the formation of a broader regional alliance that also includes Arab countries to counter Iran. Israeli-US talks had been preceded by discussions and joint drills to strengthen Israel's defense capabilities. The cooperation between the two sides in relation to Iran is quite apparent.<sup>(3)</sup>

### **The Jeddah Summit and Reassuring Allies**

In Jeddah, the last stop of his foreign tour, Biden discussed Iran's behavior in the region. He and the Gulf leaders emphasized their support to ensure the Gulf region remained free of weapons of mass destruction and the importance of continuing with diplomatic efforts to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons as well as to counter terrorist acts that undermine the security and stability of the Gulf region. Riyadh and Washington underpinned the necessity to deter any Iranian interference in the affairs of other countries and Tehran's support of proxy terrorist groups that destabilize the security of the region in addition to preventing it from possessing nuclear weapons.<sup>(4)</sup>

The United States expressed its support to counter the dangers posed by Iran, stressing the importance of diplomacy to tackle Tehran's nuclear file. The US reaffirmed its cooperation and support for the security of its allies in the region, the free and safe flow of maritime navigation in Middle Eastern waterways like the Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Strait of Hormuz, and the prevention of a military takeover of a country through threats or incursions. Biden affirmed the United States' commitment to accelerate efforts with its allies in the region to integrate and enhance security cooperation. The United States is "committed to advancing a more integrated and regionally-networked air and missile defense architecture and countering the proliferation of unmanned aerial systems and missiles to non-state actors that threaten the peace and security of the region."<sup>(5)</sup>

### **The Tehran Summit and Attempts to Counterbalance the Moves of the United States**

Iran was concerned about Biden's trip to the Middle East after widespread talk about the possible formation of a new security coalition or a "Middle East NATO," which will partially be tasked with countering Iran. In a hedging move, Iran hosted the Tehran summit attended by President Ebrahim Raisi, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The summit claimed to discuss the Syrian crisis though the three parties have been engaging in the Astana talks for the same purpose. However, it was eventually revealed that the Tehran summit was a response to Biden's Middle Eastern trip. The summit's message denoted that Iran has influential allies in the international arena and it can form an alliance to counterbalance the potential alliance that Washington wants to form in Western Asia. This alliance may include China besides Iran and Russia.<sup>(6)</sup>

The Russian talks in Iran led to the conclusion of agreements in regard to investments in the energy sector and enhancing the infrastructure of the North South corridor. In addition, Moscow and Tehran agreed to use national currencies in transactions and increase the volume of trade. The aforementioned indicates that Russia can move forward with a partnership with Iran that may

ignite a cold war in the region and its old policy of forming alliances. Russia believes that by cooperating with Iran it can undermine the ramifications of US sanctions and support Iran's position in the nuclear talks in Vienna.<sup>(7)</sup>

Iran's nuclear policies contributed to halting the Vienna talks to revive the 2015 nuclear deal. Iran continued its nuclear activities without the supervision of the UN watchdog and announced that it will not resume the operation of installed cameras at its nuclear sites before the return to the nuclear deal. The UN watchdog warned the West of the looming risks as Iran is close to producing a nuclear bomb. Iran resorted to improving its relations with neighboring countries and continued its "look to the East" policy; part of its strategy to evade the ramifications of US sanctions and increase its oil exports. Iran also hosted intensified talks with the Eurasian countries and concluded free trade agreements as well as launching talks with several neighboring countries.<sup>(8)</sup>

Tehran strengthened its military cooperation with several countries; it signed an agreement to sell drones to Russia.<sup>(9)</sup> It also displayed its drone fleet in a military parade conducted by the Venezuelan army. Iran also hosted the third joint naval drills — the Marine Security Belt 2022 Exercise— in the North Indian Ocean with Russia and China.

## Conclusion

The outcomes of Biden's trip to the Middle East are as follows: the United States reaffirmed its commitment to Middle Eastern security through preventing Iran from possessing nuclear weapons. Second, Washington attempted to ease the security concerns of its partners amid Iran's behavior through supporting several multilateral plans to halt Tehran's offensives against the region. Third, the United States expanded the scope of defense cooperation with countries in the region to counter the dangers posed by Iran. Fourth, it expressed its adherence to continue adopting diplomacy to revive the nuclear deal.

Biden did not manage to forge a broader regional alliance including Israel with the aim to establish a new regional order to counter Iran. This plan to establish a regional alliance was not welcomed by countries in the region in light of the complexities related to integrating Israel without resolving the Palestinian issue; a thorny issue which Biden has failed to find a settlement for. Further, the Gulf states do not want to be dragged into igniting a confrontation with Iran in light of a potential settlement of their differences with Tehran while they also refuse to be part of a polarizing policy which may throw the entire region into an unnecessary cold war. The Gulf states are fully aware of the current international shifts which allow several regional actors to exploit the region for their own interests in addition to the growing distrust of Washington as a power to ensure security and stability deterrence in the region.

So, Biden's trip did not really change the current Iranian confrontation with Washington and its allies in the region. The confrontation between Iran and Israel has intensified. The Gulf states are still concerned about Iran's behavior and the limited US support to counter it. One can conclude that forging further security arrangements with Israel or the Gulf states is still a secondary priority for Washington which is predominantly concerned with halting Russian and

Chinese influence in the region and securing its oil needs amid the global energy crisis.

The United States expressed its commitment to the policy of diplomacy to revive the nuclear deal, addressing Iranian doubts. This was apparent in Iran's support of European mediation efforts and proposing a new text to revive the nuclear deal, particularly a mutual return to compliance to the nuclear deal. Iran crafted this proposal making the maximum level of compromises after the previous nine rounds of talks — according to the European perspective. Apparently, this is the last opportunity to revive the nuclear deal. The parties to the deal will probably accept this proposal in light of the major mutual compromises made in the previous rounds — especially for Iran, giving up on its demand of removing the IRGC from Washington's terrorist list — and the current diplomacy between Iran and countries in the region. Thus, new developments are likely to lead to the creation of a new regional order.



# Iran and Europe

In June 2022, the Europe file discussed Iran's maneuvers in relation to its nuclear program; it has been heading forward with enriching uranium at 60 percent purity, higher than any level it ever reached amid the impasse in the Vienna talks to revive the nuclear deal. Iran also continued to place further pressure on the Europeans through detaining French citizens, seizing a Greek-flagged vessel, and pushing to enact legislation to release Iranian diplomats accused of planning terrorist acts. As for July, the file discusses Belgium's controversial prisoner exchange treaty with Iran, a decision which will have ramifications for European security. The legislation has opened old wounds, infuriating political lobbies and human rights groups alike. The United States' and Iran's return to the nuclear deal seems so close yet so far. France, Germany and the UK – commonly referred to as the E3 – remain engaged in fruitless diplomacy with Iran, with Tehran installing newer and faster models of centrifuges. It seems that the return to nuclear deal is quite near; yet practically speaking it is still farfetched.

## Belgian Prisoner Swap Legislation

On July 20, the Belgian Parliament approved a contentious prisoner exchange treaty with Iran, clearing the way for Brussels and Tehran to transfer convicted criminals. Though 79 legislators favored the motion and 11 abstained, 41 vehemently rejected the treaty. Signed in March between Iran and Belgium, the deal was debated by a Belgian parliamentary committee in June and referred to the Parliament in early July. The speed of the passing of the legislation reflects the urgency on both ends.

On the Iranian side, the arrest of its diplomat Assadollah Assadi because of his involvement in a bomb plot in Paris in 2018 has been the primary motive for the deal.<sup>(10)</sup> Tehran had denied all allegations of Assadi's involvement in the terror scheme. In February, it arrested Olivier Vandecasteele, a Belgian humanitarian worker who was earlier country director for the Norwegian Refugee Council, on espionage charges.<sup>(11)</sup> The IRGC have detained him in Evin prison, where he has met the Belgium ambassador twice. "Belgium does not abandon its citizens," Justice Minister Van Quickenborne said during a parliamentary debate.<sup>(12)</sup> Iran has also kept Swedish-Iranian academic Ahmadreza Bjalali in custody since 2016. He has been on death row for allegedly carrying out espionage for Israel.

Besides some Belgian and many European politicians, Amnesty International is one of the key human rights watchdogs which is outraged at the swap deal ratified by Brussels. It warned that the deal must not "serve to grant impunity" to Iranian agents hunting foes and dissidents in Europe.<sup>(13)</sup>

Despite the Belgium Parliament's approval, the Brussels Court of Appeal banned the Belgian government from extraditing Assadi to Iran. The court justified its decision by saying that the rights of the plaintiffs "could be irreparably violated." The court confirmed that the ban would continue until the hearing of the plaintiffs is held and a ruling on the matter is issued.<sup>(14)</sup>

From an Iranian perspective, a glitch was expected. The proceedings may become cumbersome for Tehran as the case for his release has turned into a legal matter. Brussels will not publicly link Assadi's release with its arrested citizen without justifying the former's release on its own merit. The prisoner exchange and Assadi's maligned actions are two separate matters in the eyes of the legal system but not so in Belgium's political and executive realms.

### **European Tensions Rising Over the Future of the Nuclear Talks**

A European Union (EU) official was quoted by Reuters as saying that the nuclear talks are coming to an end concerning the revival of the nuclear deal but there are no results in sight. "We are very, very advanced in the negotiations. We have had a round of so-called proximity talks in Doha; they produced no results and the reason is very clear because we have negotiated everything that was on the table," the news agency quoting a senior unnamed EU official.<sup>(15)</sup>

This unnamed EU official added, "We can be more precise on some details that are still pending, we are waiting for some ideas from Tehran and what the Americans have to say...I don't know (if it is) the end of the process, but the end of the negotiations, yes."<sup>(16)</sup> Meanwhile, Paris also warned Iran a few weeks before that the window for talks would soon be closed. During a phone call with his Iranian counterpart, French President Emmanuel Macron warned Iran again indirectly by saying that reviving the 2015 nuclear deal was "still possible" but must happen "as soon as possible."<sup>(17)</sup> Addressing the French Parliament, French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna stated, "There is still a window of opportunity ... for Iran to finally decide to accept an accord which it worked to build, but time is passing."<sup>(18)</sup>

The statement comes against the backdrop of Iran's installation of IR-6 centrifuges in the subterranean Fuel Enrichment Plant (FFEP).<sup>(19)</sup> If the IAEA is not updated on the changes made in the facility's operational capability, it will not be able to assess the pace of Iran's uranium enrichment. There is no officially available data from the Iranian Atomic Energy Organization but based on various sets of information, it is believed, "Compared to the original reported theoretical value of 6.7 SWU per year per centrifuge, the final values are about half. Based on the available operational data, the IR-6 centrifuge is not performing much better than the IR-2m and IR-4 centrifuges."<sup>(20)</sup>

With the upgradation of its nuclear enrichment facilities while keeping the IAEA practically in the dark, Iran signaled in July that the talks to return to the nuclear deal have met a dead-end. To clarify any doubts, the supreme leader's spokesman admitted Iran's capability to build nuclear weapons.<sup>(21)</sup> Tehran's signaling is not whimsical but well calculated and coordinated. However, the doors of the nuclear talks are still open on all sides of the table.

## Conclusion

The Belgian Parliament's approval of the prisoner swap deal with Iran would not have been possible without Brussels' desire to free its detained citizen in Tehran and the latter's insistence on releasing convicted Iranian diplomat Assadollah Assadi, who is imprisoned in Brussels. Belgium is not the only European country concerned about Assadi's case. There are other countries, particularly France, which are targets of terrorist operations. However, it appears that the arrest of French citizens by Iranian authorities was the reason for Paris' silence on the Iran-Belgium agreement. This agreement is expected to have serious consequences for Iranian dissidents. It would encourage Iranian intelligence agencies to conduct more terrorist operations against Iranian dissidents based in Europe. At the level of the nuclear talks, which have been stalled since March, it appears that the return of the European countries, particularly France, to using threats that time is running out is another attempt to put pressure on Iran. They want to not only restart negotiations, but also speed up the conclusion of a nuclear deal. However, recent Iranian actions related to the installation of centrifuges at the Natanz enrichment facility clearly indicate that hinting at the possibility of ending the negotiations will not be influential factors pushing Iran to respond to international pressures.



## Endnotes

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# IRAN CASE FILE

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