

MONTHLY REPORT

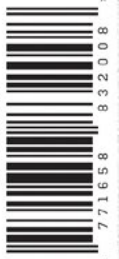
Iran Case File

MAY 2024

Your window on Iran from inside and abroad



ISSN 1658-8320



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ISSN 1658 - 8320

WWW.RASANAHAH-IIIIS.ORG

Rasanah_iiiis

info@rasanahiiiis.com

+966112166696

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During May 2024, Iran experienced a series of rapid developments across political, military, social, and ideological spheres. These changes also significantly influenced Iran's relations with Arab and international entities, with expected repercussions on its foreign relations in the near future.

Internally, the death of the Iranian President and his accompanying delegation in a helicopter crash was a major shock, particularly to the supreme leader and supporters of the "conservative" movement who had been relying on him to steer the government. This incident has revived electoral momentum, leading to early presidential elections scheduled for June 28, 2024. The Iranian Ministry of Interior Affairs announced that 80 candidates received initial approval, including several senior officials, pending the final decision from the Guardian Council, responsible for determining the eligibility of candidates.

Militarily, Turkish intervention via the Akinci drone in the search for the helicopter wreckage took on a competitive tone. Turkey used this opportunity to showcase its military industry, particularly its drones, which played a significant role. Iran quickly denied Turkish claims that its drones located the missing helicopter, asserting that Iranian drones accomplished the task. However, the events and their details substantiated the Turkish narrative, highlighting the efficiency and capabilities of Turkish drones compared to Iranian ones.

Socially, Iran grapples with contradictions between its aspirations as a regional power and the economic realities that challenge its ambitions. The demographic aspect is a prime example, where the state aims to build a robust populace but faces economic pressures that push society in an opposite direction, creating a cycle of conflicting needs and choices.

On the ideological front, the demand to recognize the Ghadir Day as a national holiday in Iraq sparked significant controversy. Sunni and Kurdish circles viewed it as a constitutional violation. Additionally, a dispute between Muqtada al-Sadr and Ayatollah Muneer al-Khabbaz arose over what Sadr perceived as an attack on his father's authority, leading to tensions within the Shiite community in Najaf.

In terms of foreign relations, May 2024 was marked by significant events. In Iraq, sectarian and ethnic tensions flared up following the parliamentary vote to recognize the Ghadir Day as an official holiday. This decision was met with opposition from Sunni, Kurdish and Turkmen groups, who feared the imposition of a Shiite narrative over their own. This move

is seen as a step towards solidifying a sub-Shiite identity for Iraq at the expense of a unified national identity, potentially increasing sectarian conflicts.

Regarding Iran-Syria relations, the sudden death of the Iranian president raises questions about the future direction of Iran's policy towards Syria. Despite this, it is likely that Iran will maintain its current approach due to the political structure in Iran and Syria's significance in Iran's regional agenda. However, internal political developments in Iran and shifting Syrian-Arab relations, along with the Israeli war on Gaza, could challenge these relations.

Concerning international interactions, US-Iran relations remain strained due to the tensions from Operation Al-Aqsa Flood and the Israeli war on Gaza. Nonetheless, both sides are managing the conflict to prevent escalation. The deaths of the Iranian president and his foreign minister, along with complications surrounding the nuclear agreement, add further complexity. With upcoming presidential elections in both Iran and the United States, relations are expected to remain tense until the end of 2024.

DEVELOPMENTS IN IRAN'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS

In May 2024, Iran witnessed numerous significant developments across political, military, social, and ideological spheres. The most notable events include:

- Presidential Elections After the Death of Ebrahim Raisi and a Number of His Entourage.
- Iran's Use of Turkish Drones Reveals the Weakness of Its Military Strategic Capabilities.
- Human Rights Organizations Revive Debate Over Reproductive Law in Iran.
- Hawza Interactions; the Ghadir Day Controversy and the Issue of the Marjaya.

Presidential Elections After the Death of Ebrahim Raisi and a Number of His Entourage

Iran is going through a delicate transition phase after the death of President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and seven other colleagues in a helicopter crash over the mountainous terrain of East Azerbaijan Province, northwestern Iran. The accident occurred on their return from the inauguration of the Qiz-Qalasi Dam at the border with the Republic of Azerbaijan. While the sudden death of Raisi caused profound shock in Iran, especially for the Iranian supreme leader and the “conservatives” who were heavily relying on him to run the country and possibly to succeed the supreme leader in the coming period, his death has brought to the surface Iran’s electoral momentum after the election of his successor was set on June, 28 2024. The May 2024 report will attempt to shed light on this incident and the Iranian preparations for the presidential elections scheduled in June to elect Raisi’s successor.

The Death of Raisi and the Establishment’s Attempts to Absorb the Shock

Iran experienced difficult hours on Sunday, May 19, 2024, after the helicopter carrying President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, the representa-

tive of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in East Azerbaijan Province, Tabriz Friday Imam Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Ale-Hashem, East Azerbaijan Governor Malik Rahmati and the five crew members of the helicopter were declared missing. All Iranian efforts to find the helicopter failed. The search and rescue operations continued until the next morning May 20 when those in the helicopter were pronounced dead after it crashed on a mountain near the Iranian town Varzqan on the border with the Republic of Azerbaijan.

According to the Iranian authorities, bad weather was the cause of the helicopter crash. However, doubts were raised that the helicopter might have crashed because of arson. Iranian investigations have not yet confirmed the veracity of this assumption. The General Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces released a report ruling out the possibility of a sabotage explosion leading to the crash. Investigations have not identified any cause for the helicopter crash. The Iranian government promised to follow up on the investigation to discover the exact causes of the helicopter crash.⁽¹⁾ Ahmad Alamolhoda, representative of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in Razavi Khorasan Province and father-in-law of the late President Ebrahim Raisi, confirmed that several assumptions have been raised regarding the causes of the helicopter crash, but in-

(1) تسنیم، دومین گزارش ابعاد و علل سانحه بالگرد رئیس جمهور منتشر شد، (9 خرداد 1403 ه.ش)، تاریخ الاطلاع: 5 یونیو
<https://tinyurl.com/59zky3t> .2024

vestigations have not yet specified a cause of the helicopter crash.⁽¹⁾

Prior to the announcement of the president's death, Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei called on the Iranian people not to worry and reassured them that the country would not be affected by the incident. The messages of reassurance of Khamenei to the Iranian people demonstrated the concerns arising from the absence of the president of the republic as it would have critical repercussions at the internal and external levels. This is due to the significant ties between the post of the supreme leader and the president of the republic within the hierarchy of the Iranian establishment, the personal ties of the supreme leader to the late president and the years-long talk regarding Khamenei's intention to prepare Raisi to succeed him as supreme leader. After the deaths of the president and his entourage were confirmed, Iran's supreme leader officially announced the appointment of Mohammad Mokhber, the first vice president, as caretaker president, according to Article 131 of the Iranian Constitution. It stipulated that in case of death, dismissal, resignation, absence or illness lasting longer than two months, or when his term in office has ended and a new president has not been elected due to some impediments, or similar other circumstances, his first deputy shall assume the role with the approval of

the supreme leader. The council, consisting of the Speaker of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, the chief justice and the first deputy of the president, is obliged to arrange for a new president to be elected within a maximum period of 50 days. In case of the death of the first deputy to the president or other matters which prevent him from performing his duties or when the president does not have a first deputy, the supreme leader shall appoint another person in his place.

Preparations for Early Presidential Elections

After recovering from the shock of the helicopter crash, the Iranian establishment started to prepare the ground for the post-Raisi stage. The meeting held by Chief Justice Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Eje'i, Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and Mohammad Mokhber, who is currently interim president, determined June 28, 2024 to hold early presidential elections to elect the successor of Raisi. They decided on a five-day registration of candidates starting from May 30 to June 3, 2024. The Guardian Council would conduct the review of candidates' eligibility within seven days. On June 11, the names of candidates would be announced and published by the Ministry of Interior. From June 12 to June 26, the election campaigns of the candidates would begin. One day before the elections on June 27, the electoral

(1) انتخاب، علم الهدی: عامل خارجی در حادثه سقوط بالگرد رئیس‌جمهور شناسایی نشده است، (9 خرداد 1403 ه.ش)، تاریخ الاطلاع: 5 یونیو 2024. <https://tinyurl.com/y3zuh9dj>

process would begin and on June 28, elections would be held.⁽¹⁾

With regard to issues concerning electoral procedures, especially voter registration, 80 candidates received preliminary approval by the Ministry of Interior. These candidates are awaiting the final decision of Guardian Council, which will finally determine their eligibility to run in the elections. The most prominent names can be enumerated as follows:

1. The “conservatives” within the government that was headed by Raisi and is now headed by Mohammad Mokher: Vice President of Al-Shaid organization Amir-Hossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi, Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazrpash, Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad Mehdi Esmaili, and Minister of Labor and Social Welfare Sowlat Mortazavi.

2. “Conservatives” outside the government including the member of the Expediency Discernment Council, Khamenei’s representative in the Supreme National Security Council Saeed Jalili, and the current Mayor of the Tehran Municipality Alireza Zakani.

3. “Reformists,” including former First Vice President of Hassan Rouhani Eshaq Jahangiri, member of the Iranian Parliament Masoud Pezeshkian, former Minister of Roads and Urban Development Abbas Akhoun-di, and Minister of Labor Cooperation

and Social Welfare in the government of Hassan Rouhani Mohammad Shariatmadari.

4. The “moderates” including former Parliament Speaker and member of the Expediency Discernment Council Ali Larijani, former Central Bank Governor Abdolnasser Hemmati.

5. Current Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, and second Deputy Speaker Ali Nikzad.

6. Former officials: former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, former Minister of Justice in the government of Hassan Rouhani and Secretary General of the Association of Combatant Clerics Mostafa Pourmohammadi.

The interactions indicate that the Guardian Council will reject the eligibility of most candidates and retain a sufficient number to run the presidential elections. There is no sign of whether the establishment will favor a certain candidate and prepare the ground for him to assume the post of president, similar to the recent presidential elections when it facilitated the late Raisi’s electoral victory.

Conclusion

The reality imposed by the “conservatives” on Iranian political life over the past few years demonstrates that the electoral process will orchestrate the victory of a candidate of the “conservative” current. If the establishment resorts to clear the way for the “reformists,” this step will mainly aim

(1) خبرآنلاین، زمان بندی انتخابات ریاست جمهوری اعلام شد + جدول، (1 خرداد 1403 ه.ش)، تاریخ اطلاع: 5 یونیو 2024
<https://2u.pw/wjq5EiPk>

to illustrate the legitimacy of the ruling establishment. The competition between the currents will encourage electoral participation, which declined significantly during the recent elections and became a pretext used by the establishment's opponents, confirming its loss of political legitimacy and popular support.

Iran's Use of Turkish Drones Reveals the Weakness of Its Military Strategic Capabilities

The crash of President Ebrahim Raisi's helicopter laid bare flaws in Iran's much-hyped drone force, which could not locate the wreckage on its own. The fact that it had to seek the assistance of Türkiye, a NATO member, in locating the downed helicopter led to unforeseen complications. Here we discuss this issue through the following two axes: the Iranian government's request for the Turkish Akinci drone and Turkish gains from the Akinci's flight to Iran.

Iran's Request for the Turkish Akinci Drone

The crash of the Iranian President's helicopter gave the government two options: keep looking for the crash site into the night and the next day amidst inclement weather using its resources or seek foreign assistance from neighbouring countries such as Turkey and Azerbaijan. By 11.15 pm, six hours after the VIP flight went missing, Iran contacted Türkiye for support in the search and rescue operation. The Akinci drone entered

Iranian airspace around 12.45 am and returned by 6 am to its home base, the Batman Airfield. Türkiye's high-altitude, long-endurance, twin-engine multirole drone located the crashed helicopter's heat signature 20 kilometers from Azerbaijan's border.⁽¹⁾ The drone drew a crescent and star over Van Lake on flight radar, to mark Türkiye's technological forte. The weather in Iran had grounded Iranian air assets suitable for such an operation. The Akinci's ASELFLIR-500 system for electro-optical reconnaissance, surveillance and targeting proved its capabilities a few months after its installation on the uncrewed combat aerial vehicle (UCAV).⁽²⁾ None of the Iranian drones possesses the array of capabilities of the Akinci which range from electronic support and ECM systems, dual satellite communication systems, air-to-air radar, collision avoidance radar, and advanced synthetic-aperture radar.

Tehran was less than impressed and appreciative of the Turkish assistance. "Despite Türkiye sending a drone equipped with night vision and thermal cameras, the drone failed to accurately locate the crash site due to its lack of detection equipment and control points below the cloud," Iran's military said in a statement.⁽³⁾

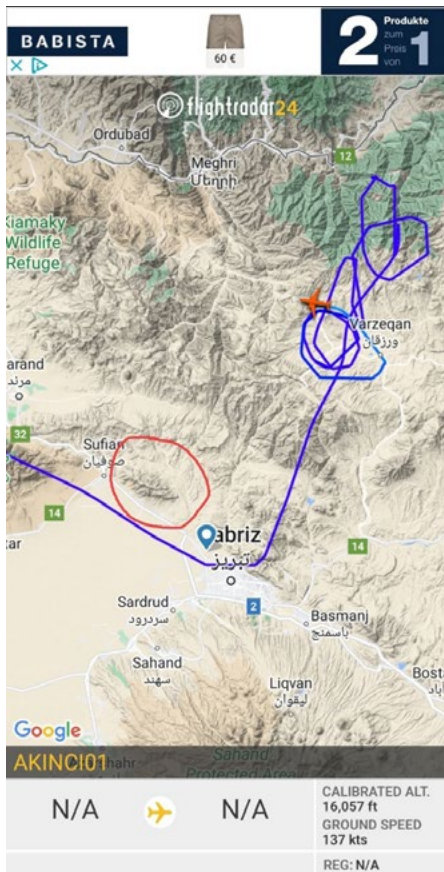
For decades, Iran projected itself as a top drone power yet its diverse fleet was not able to make the mark when the moment arrived. Its drones could not sustain the weather stress and their sensors fell short of successfully conducting the mission i.e. locating

the helicopter carrying the country's president and foreign minister.

Turkish Gains From the Akinci's Flight to Iran

Ankara, on the other hand, livestreamed the Akinci footage, amassing more than 3 million viewers globally.⁽⁴⁾ Since 2021, Baykar has been producing Akinci drones for Türkiye, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Saudi Arabia and the Maldives.

Image 1: Flight Path of Akinci01



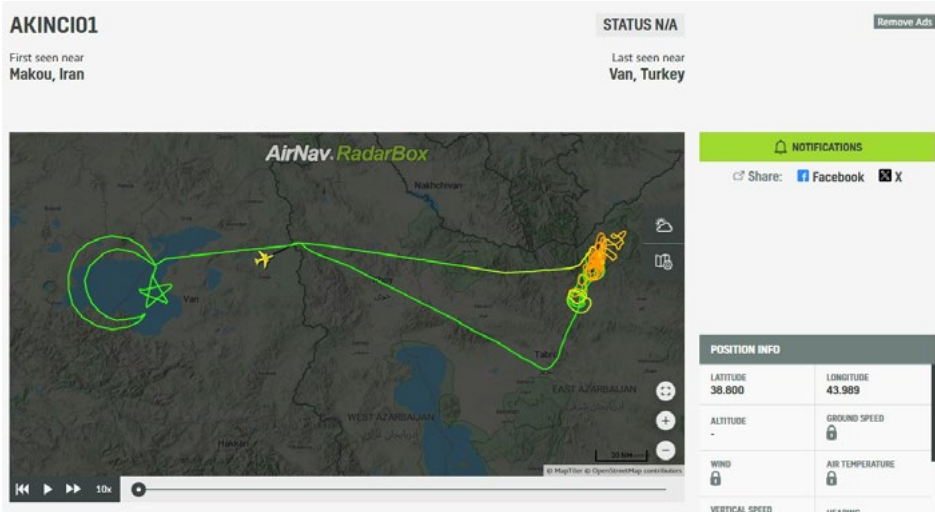
Source: Flightradar 24, <https://2u.pw/p7YMDig9>

As the Akinci footage attracted viewers on X, many noticed an interesting path it had taken to reach the crash site in Iran near Azeri territory. The drone, equipped with sophisticated cameras and other sensors, flew over a significant number of sensitive Iranian military sites i.e. the Amand rocket site, Khoi Airport, Tabriz Airport, and the Iranian army's rapid response base near Tabriz. The Akinci could have flown directly to the suspected crash region without flying over Iran's vital military installations. The below image is an open-source flight path of the drone Akinci01.

Interestingly, the return flight of Akinci01 did not involve an L-shaped path over Tabriz but a straight line to Turkey, possibly there was no need to film the Iranian installations any further. In the below image, Akinci's return flight is a straight-line return path compared to the toured flight into Iran.

The unique opportunity for deep surveillance inside Iran's regions brought some invaluable information not only for Ankara and Baku but also for NATO. If Brussels seeks, and there is no reason to not to, Ankara is bound to provide the intelligence gathered in the publicized trip on Iran's fateful day. Besides, Azerbaijan and Türkiye both enjoy friendly strategic ties with Israel, which would definitely be interested in a high-resolution and close-range multi-medium surveillance coup by the Akinci01.

Image 2: The Akinci's Flight Path to Iran and Back



Source: Air.Nav.RadarBox, <https://2u.pw/PPKUnOwc>

Conclusion

Tehran's belated rage over Ankara's feat of finding Raisi's crashed helicopter is driven by all of the above-mentioned factors. However, its denial about the Akinci does not go beyond face-saving at home because Iran failed to carry out this mission and discovered widespread flaws and gaps in its military strategy as well as in its industries.

Human Rights Organizations Revive Debate Over Reproductive Law in Iran

Iran is deeply concerned with the sharp decline in fertility rates and is constantly seeking solutions to mitigate the demographic risks facing the country in the medium and long term. Among the measures taken to increase fertility rates is the crimi-

nalization of abortion, which has had negative repercussions on women in Iran. This prompted Iranian and international human rights organizations to issue a statement demanding that the authorities review the Family and Youth Law, thereby reviving the debate on issues of childbearing and women's rights. Here we discuss the Iranian governments efforts to boost childbearing, the implications of the reproductive plan law, and the reasons behind declining fertility rates.

The Iranian Government's Efforts to Increase Fertility

Three years ago, through the "Family, Population, and Youth Protection" law, the Iranian government pursued two main strategies to increase fertility rates. The first strategy involved various forms of incentives, particularly economic ones, such as

childbirth incentives,⁽⁵⁾ paid maternity leave, and car grants for mothers.⁽⁶⁾ The government allocated budgets for marriage,⁽⁷⁾ housing and expenses and also offered free treatment for infertility and children under seven years of age, food parcels for mothers of infants, and the establishment of dormitories for married couples in cooperation with universities and philanthropists.⁽⁸⁾ In a recent move, the Deputy Coordinator of the IRGC Mohammad Reza Naghdi announced an increase in the salaries of IRGC members based on the number of children they have: 18% for two children, 20% for three children, 50% for four children, 80% for five children, and 100% for six children. This comes at a time when Iran is experiencing a sharp decline in the birth rate.⁽⁹⁾

The second strategy involved restricting advocates of childlessness through several policies, most notably the criminalization of abortion except for very limited exceptions, the digitization of pregnancy at various stages to prevent abortion, the reduction of budgets allocated to family planning, the cessation of contraceptive services, the increase in the prices of contraceptives, and the banning of some contraceptive methods, such as vasectomy for men.

The Repercussions of the Reproductive Plan Law

The Iranian government believes that the measures taken have yielded positive results, as they have halted the decline in fertility rates. According to

Ministry of Health officials, the population decline began to slow gradually from 2020 onwards, thanks to the implementation of the law, whereas it was previously expected to continue declining sharply. The fertility rate reached 1.66 in 2022 with an increasing trend. Additionally, the divorce rate has declined since the advent of Raisi's government and the implementation of this law.⁽¹⁰⁾

However, opponents of the law argue that the government is ignoring its negative repercussions, which had been previously warned about before the law came into effect. Based on the outcomes of the past three years, 16 organizations defending human rights in Iran and abroad issued a statement on May 10, 2024, calling on the international community and human rights activists to condemn and end the "restrictive reproductive policies" in Iran. They urged international and governmental organizations to demand the abolition of discriminatory laws in this field through diplomatic channels. These organizations emphasized the need to abolish restrictive laws that criminalize abortion and called for specialized monitoring by international institutions concerned with human rights issues. They stressed the importance of holding Iran accountable for violating women's rights and taking targeted actions against those directly involved in these violations.⁽¹¹⁾

Reasons for Low Fertility Rates

Many studies indicate that the decline in fertility rates is attributed to

economic challenges and societal transformations. The most significant reasons include:

- Poor economic conditions: Economic instability is a major factor affecting reproductive decisions. Concerns about the future welfare of children lead parents to refrain from having more children or even to divorce.⁽¹²⁾

- Culture of birth control: The spread of birth control practices among younger generations persists, even though it was initially a government policy to address population explosions and economic pressures. Despite the government's shift away from this policy, society continues to view it as appropriate.

- Delaying the age of marriage: Many working women postpone marriage and childbearing due to their careers, which reduces their fertility period. Men also delay marriage, contributing to lower fertility rates.⁽¹³⁾

- Aging population: Iran is among the top three countries experiencing rapid demographic transformations, leading to increased strain on the state budget to provide healthcare and insurance for the elderly.⁽¹⁴⁾ It is projected that by 2050, Iran's elderly population will exceed 26 million.⁽¹⁵⁾

Conclusion

In light of ongoing poor economic conditions, it is likely that fertility rates will continue to decline while the aging population increases. Government efforts to address these issues remain ineffective, particularly

as global cultural trends contribute to lower fertility rates, even in economically stable conditions. Consequently, the legal measures being emphasized by the Iranian government may exacerbate other issues, notably the prevalence of abortions conducted outside official frameworks.

Hawza Interactions: the Ghadir Day Controversy and the Issue of the Marjaya

Heated discussions arose in Iraqi religious and hawza circles following demands to make Ghadir Day an official holiday. Some viewed this as a reasonable reflection of a broad faction within the state, while others saw it as a violation of the Constitution and political norms. The supreme marjaya did not officially comment on the matter. Additionally, a dispute emerged between Hojatoleslam Muqtada al-Sadr and Ayatollah Muneer al-Khabbaz, due to what Sadr perceived as an attack by Khabbaz on the marja status of his father Ayatollah Muhammad al-Sadr. This incident increased tensions within the hawza community in Najaf, the details of which are analyzed below:

Establishing Ghadir Day as a National Holiday — Ideological Objectives

Ghadir Day holds special significance for Twelver Shiites, who celebrate it annually on the 18th of Dhul-Hijjah. This day commemorates the event in Ghadir Khumm, where Shiites believe that Prophet Muhammad (peace be

upon him) designated Ali Ibn Abi Talib as his successor. According to their tradition, the Prophet addressed his companions, saying, "Whoever I am his guardian, then Ali is his guardian." However, other non-Shiite Islamic sects consider this narration to be conjectural in terms of both transmission and meaning.

1. Demanding a Ghadir Day Holiday

On April 19, Shiite leader Muqtada al-Sadr demanded that Ghadir Day be declared an official holiday in Iraq.⁽¹⁶⁾ Sadr exerted religious pressure on the Parliament, stating, "If the members of Parliament vote on this, I thank them, and if they do not vote, then the Prophet Muhammad and Imam Ali will be their foes."⁽¹⁷⁾ In response, the Parliament officially agreed to include Ghadir Day as an official holiday for Iraqis. Sadr praised the Parliament's decision and called on all Iraqis to neither remain heedless nor effusively express their joy and celebration on Ghadir Day.⁽¹⁸⁾

2. Sunnis Demanding the Official Recognition of Saqifah Day

Before the Iraqi Parliament approved the decision to designate Ghadir Day as an official holiday, other religious factions attempted to obstruct this legislation. Sunni groups demanded that Saqifah Day also be recognized as an official holiday. Abd al-Wahhab al-Samarrai, the imam and preacher at the Imam Abu Hanifa al-Nu'man Mosque, stated, "Either you respect all identities, then it will be a holiday for the Day of Ghadir, a holiday for Saqifah Day, and a holiday for the inaugu-

ration of our master, the Commander of the Faithful, Omar Ibn Al-Khattab, the martyr of the niche, regardless of who agrees or objects."⁽¹⁹⁾ However, Sunni pressure was insufficient to prevent the approval of the Ghadir holiday due to the lack of strong Sunni representation in the Parliament.

3. Objectives and Significations

The Ghadir Day issue encompasses both religious and political dimensions. Primarily, Ghadir, like Ashura, is a significant Shiite ritual that has been part of the Shiite collective consciousness for centuries. Consequently,

demands for the inclusion of Ghadir Day as a national holiday, even if politically motivated at times, are considered natural expressions of religious and sectarian heritage, finding popular acceptance among the Shiite populace and religious followers. Politically, the push for recognizing Ghadir Day as an official holiday serves some parties' aims to secure political gains and prepare for the upcoming elections. Critics, however, argue that such legislation violates the Iraqi Constitution, specifically Article 14, which ensures equality for all Iraqis regardless of gender, race, nationality, origin, religion, sect, belief, opinion, economic, or social status. Additionally, opponents fear that this legislation undermines the dream of a civil state by promoting sectarianism and factionalism. Conversely, Muqtada al-Sadr contends that the legislation is not sectarian but rather unifying, asserting that Ghadir Day is

a celebration for all Muslims, not just Shiites.

Sadr and the Supreme Marjaya

There is a longstanding historical dispute over the leadership of the Shiite world, which intensified after the death of Ayatollah al-Khoei. The core of this dispute lies between some marjas of Najaf and Ayatollah Muhammad al-Sadr, Muqtada al-Sadr's father. This contention arose because Ayatollah Muhammad al-Sadr assumed a leading marja role without adhering to traditional hawza customs, according to his critics. He positioned himself as a "speaking marja," engaging actively with political and social realities, in contrast to his opponents, who adhered to the concept of a "silent hawza" that refrains from such direct involvement.

1. The remarks of Khabbaz: A lecture by Ayatollah Muneer al-Khabbaz, a prominent teacher in the hawza and a key student of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, recently gained attention. Khabbaz refuted the notion of a "silent hawza" versus a "speaking hawza." He emphasized that the entire hawza is active, discerning when to speak and when to remain silent. He stated, "When we read the history of our eminent marjas, we did not find a silent hawza. This designation is unfair to the marjaya. We did not find a silent hawza, nor did we find a dormant hawza. We have found our marjas chosen by the hawza to convey the divine message. They possess a skill for placing things where they

should exactly be."⁽²⁰⁾ Khabbaz denied that the hawza possesses characteristics of quietism and passivity, arguing that any silence is tactical rather than strategic, carefully considering the political situation and social context.

2. Sadr's Statement Against Khabbaz:

Although Khabbaz did not criticize a specific person or marja, Muqtada al-Sadr perceived Khabbaz's remarks as an attack on the marja status of his father, Muhammad al-Sadr. In response, Muqtada al-Sadr issued an official statement affirming the validity of his father's narrative that the hawza is divided into "speaking" and "silent."⁽²¹⁾ In his statement, Sadr sought to neutralize the marjaya in Najaf and its supporters by categorizing notable marjas as "speaking." He cited Khoei for his support of the 1991 uprising and Sistani for his fatwa against ISIS and the establishment of the Popular Mobilization Forces during the fall of Anbar and Mosul. Sadr also included Khomeini as a "speaking" marja for his fatwa against Salman Rushdie. Additionally, Sadr addressed the issue of the "Iraqi hawza," replacing the dichotomy of the "Arab hawza" versus the "Iranian hawza" with the "Iraqi hawza" versus the "foreign hawza." It seems that Sadr aimed to send a broader message to various actors within the hawza, not just to Khabbaz. Many influential clerics in the Najaf hawza are non-Iraqis, and this diversity has been a hallmark since its inception. The contemporary marjas of Najaf are predominantly non-Iraq-

is, which suggest that -Sadr's message was directed primarily at the inner circles of the hawza. He likely sought to address the structure and influence of the hawza by emphasizing an "Iraqi hawza" versus the "foreign hawza" dichotomy. This message was also intended for the broader Iraqi public, particularly the Shiite base and *taqlid* incubators, to reinforce the notion of a distinctly Iraqi religious leadership within the Shiite community.

Conclusion

Muqtada al-Sadr's recent moves in the Shiite arena signal a multifaceted strategy aimed at consolidating his influence both politically and religiously. His demand to designate Ghadir Day as an official holiday underscores his efforts to appeal to Shiite sentiments and solidify his position as a prominent Shiite leader. Concurrent-

ly, his confrontation with Ayatollah Muneer al-Khabbaz reflects deeper tensions within the hawza, highlighting a broader dispute beyond mere criticism of his father, Ayatollah Muhammad al-Sadr. Sadr's ambitions extend beyond political leadership; he seeks to bolster his presence within the hawza, advocating for the establishment of an Iraqi marjaya in Najaf. This strategic maneuver suggests an attempt to shape the post-Sistani landscape and potentially ascend to a leadership role akin to his father's. Such a development would mark a pivotal moment in Najaf's history, though it is fraught with religious, social, and political challenges. Sadr's convergence of political leadership and religious authority embodies his theory of governance philosophy, yet its realization hinges on overcoming significant obstacles.

Endnotes

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IRAN-ARAB INTERACTIONS

Iran's relations with some Arab countries are experiencing important developments. In Iraq, a new sectarian and ethnic controversy has emerged following the Iraqi Parliament's vote on a request by Muqtada al-Sadr, leader of the Sadrist Movement, to recognize Ghadir Day as an official holiday. This law is expected to provoke widespread debate in Iraq. In Syria, the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi has led to various interpretations regarding the future of Iran's foreign policy toward Syria. However, the prevailing expectation is that Iran's approach to Syria will remain unchanged due to Syria's significance in Iran's regional strategy.

The key issues to be addressed include:

- Harbingers of a New Round of Sectarian, Ethnic Strife in Iraq.
- Iran-Syria Relations Following the Death of Ebrahim Raisi.

Harbingers of a New Round of Sectarian, Ethnic Strife in Iraq

In a decision that has ignited sectarian and ethnic tensions, the Iraqi Parliament voted on May 22, 2024, to approve the request of Muqtada al-Sadr, leader of the Sadrist Movement, to designate Ghadir Day as an official holiday. Ghadir Day marks the incident of Ghadir Khumm, on which Shiites believe that Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) designated Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor and caliph of Muslims, a view that contrasts with the Sunni recognition of Abu Bakr al-Siddiq as the first caliph. This move has led to concerns among various sectarian and ethnic groups about the potential dominance of the Shiite narrative over others in Iraq. Representatives from the Sunni, Kurdish and Turkmen communities have called for the recognition of holidays that reflect their own significant historical and symbolic events, to ensure a more inclusive representation within the country's official holiday calendar.

Shiites Insisting on the Imposition of a Historical Narrative Over the Other Iraqi Confessions

In a televised speech on May 17, 2024, Muqtada al-Sadr demanded that Eid al-Ghadir (Ghadir Day) be included in the list of official holidays for the country.⁽¹⁾ He later reiterated his commitment to this demand, stating, “By order of the people and the moderate national majority of all its sects, the House of Representatives must pass a

law that makes the eighteenth of the month of Dhu al-Hijjah, Eid al-Ghadir, an official public holiday for all Iraqis, regardless of their affiliation and belief.”⁽²⁾

To push for the law, Sadr mobilized his followers, using street protests to pressure the Parliament into meeting his demand. Large masses of his Shiite supporters participated in unified Friday prayers across several Shiite-majority provinces. Sadr further intensified the pressure on the Parliament, warning that if it did not agree to make Eid al-Ghadir an official holiday, “it would have to confront Muhammad and Ali as their opponents, Sunnis and Shiites.”⁽³⁾

The pressure exerted by Sadr and his followers yielded results. It did not take long for the Parliament, with a majority of Shiite members from the Coordination Framework — an alliance of Shiite factions supported by Iran — to respond to Sadr's demand. On May 22, 2024, the Parliament agreed to include Eid al-Ghadir in the law on official holidays.

It is a strange irony that the new holiday law recognizes Eid al-Ghadir and three holidays specific to the Jewish Mosaic sect — Yom Kippur, the two days of Passover, and the two days of Sukkot — despite the dwindling Jewish presence in Iraq. Meanwhile, the law makes no mention of the anniversary of the founding of the Iraqi Republic, which falls on July 14 each year.

Sunni Criticisms of Imposing the Shiite Narrative

The conflict of narratives was exacerbated by two factors. First, many Iraqi Sunni forces rejected and criticized the recognition of Eid al-Ghadir as an official holiday. These included the Sunni religious authority represented by the Iraqi Fiqh Council, the Iraqi Islamic Party led by Rashid al-Azzawi, the Sovereignty Alliance led by Khamis al-Khanjar, the Mut-tahidoon Alliance led by former Speaker of Parliament Osama al-Nujaifi, and the Azm Alliance headed by Muthanna al-Samarrai.

The second factor is that Sunni representatives took a similar step to their Shiite counterparts by requesting that the anniversary of Saqifah Bani Sa'ida be included as an official holiday in the country. This event, during which Abu Bakr al-Siddiq was pledged allegiance as caliph of the Muslims following the death of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in the 11th Hijri year, is significant in Sunni tradition.

The Sunni faction did not possess strong levers it could deploy against the Parliament to prevent the passage of the law. This is a result of the Shiite faction's attempts to marginalize all influential Sunni figures, efforts that have been continuing since the Shiites' ascent to power. The ultimate aim is to totally control the apparatuses of the Iraqi state uncontested, thus enabling the Shiites to enforce the schemes and ideological projects adopted by their patron Iran.

Kurds and Turkmen Reject the Shiite Narrative

Despite their awareness of the difficulty in passing their decisions in Parliament,

the Kurdish and Turkmen factions adopted the same tactic used by the Shiites. They demanded official recognition of Kurdish and Turkmen events with significant symbolic meaning. The steps taken were as follows:

a. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan submitted a request to the Parliament to include March 16 — the day of the Hal-abja chemical weapons bombing — and April 14 — the anniversary of the launch of the Anfal operation⁽⁴⁾ and subsequent genocide — within the official holidays law throughout Iraq.

b. The Turkmen bloc in the Parliament proposed including Turkmen Martyr Day as an official national holiday. This day, observed on January 16, commemorates the execution of many Turkmen leaders by Saddam Hussein's regime in 1980.⁽⁵⁾

The Eid al-Ghadir holiday would reinforce sectarian tendencies and open the door wide for the confessionalization and ethnicization of national holidays. This could lead to dozens of holidays due to the presence of numerous sects and ethnicities in Iraq. Currently, Iraqi law allows provincial councils to grant holidays specific to their province for various reasons, such as Eid al-Ghadir, Saqifah Day, Turkmen Martyr Day, and others.

The Political Implications of Imposing the Shiite Narrative

The Ghadir Day holiday would mark a step towards establishing a Shiite identity for Iraq, which has traditionally held a historically Arab-Islamic identity. This move also highlights an additional explanation for the failure of the Iraqi regime, which is predom-

inantly controlled by Shiites. The regime lacks national programs that serve the state as a whole and fail to promote a unifying national identity. Instead, it focuses on sectarian programs aimed at serving a sub-identity. Consequently, the regime deviates from its primary functions, catering exclusively to Shiite political goals aligned with the Iranian agenda.

Imposing an exclusively Shiite narrative in a multi-sectarian and multi-ethnic society would also increase the likelihood of sectarian conflicts. Such conflicts have historically brought Iraq nothing but the destruction of resources and wealth, the waste of potential, the exacerbation of crises, and the collapse of state institutions.

The swift response of the Coordination Framework to Sadr's demand signals a new Shiite dynamic in Iraq. This development suggests the possibility of rapprochement between Maliki and Sadr, potentially leading to a historic reconciliation or, at the very least, a long-term truce, as both sides recognize the impracticality of a zero-sum game.

Iran stands to benefit the most from a resolution of the conflict between Sadr and Maliki. It is speculated that Iran is actively involved in fostering understanding between Sadr and Maliki to bridge the Shiite divide, which has significantly impacted Iranian efforts to expand further in the Iraqi political landscape. The division between Maliki and Sadr poses a major dilemma for Iran, as it considers the

Shiite community as the backbone of its ongoing expansionist project in Iraq. The weakening of this Shiite support base due to internal divisions threatens Iran's ability to safeguard its gains and pursue its remaining plans in the region.

Conclusion

The foregoing reveals the centrality of the sectarian parameter among Shiite political figures in their standpoints and orientations regarding Iraqi issues. The Sadrist Movement, which has over the past years continuously advocated for the state-building trajectory has failed the sectarianism test. When the decisive moment came, the movement fortified itself behind the Shiite narrative, totally overlooking the collective identity of the Iraqis. Moreover, it has called for recognizing Ghadir Day as an official holiday. Yet, this development reveals that the Shiites, controlling the government in Iraq, lack a national strategy that works for the entire Iraqi national community, thereby giving rise to sectarian conflicts. The dominant Shiite bloc have sought to harness the state and society's resources and potential to serve their members' own purposes. Therefore, crises have run deep and become more complicated, with sectarian disputes and ethnic standoffs worsening. Additionally, the breakdown in law and order continues unabated as the regime does not care for security, and it is not a priority for it. The regime's top priority instead is ensuring the imposition

and dominance of the Shiite bloc at the expense of Iraq's diverse array of ethnic and religious communities.

Iran-Syria Relations Following the Death of Ebrahim Raisi

In May 2024, the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and members of his cabinet in a helicopter crash made headlines in Iran and beyond. His death raises questions about current and future relations between Iran and Syria, especially given the significant geopolitical interactions and regional influence of Iran, particularly in Syria, at a time when the region and the world are facing unprecedented developments and conflicts.

Iran-Syria Relations During Raisi's Term

Iran's strategic interest in Syria is not new; it can be traced back to the 1979 revolution. The two countries established a strong cooperative relationship, recognizing the mutual importance of preserving their respective ruling systems and maintaining the regional balance of power equation. Successive Iranian governments, both "reformist" and "conservative," have prioritized maintaining close ties to Syria to consolidate Iran's influence across various spheres of Syrian society, particularly in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising — back then Iran intensified its military engagement with Syria. When President Raisi assumed office in August 2021, Iran's engagement with Syria evolved, employing a new strategy to manage its

influence while reducing reliance on overt military activities such as weapons delivery and support for Iranian militias. This shift was influenced by the improving security situation in Syria, with relative stability emerging on all fronts and diminishing the country's need for military assistance from Iran — compared to the period following the 2011 uprisings. These changes occurred amid significant regional developments, including the recent thaw in relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia and the resumption of ties between Arab and regional powers and the Assad government. Taking into account these developments, Raisi adopted the strategy of establishing a "soft presence" with the aim of reshaping his country's influence in Syria by reducing its explicit military and security activities and increasing its economic and political activities. It is commonly known as Iran's "spider strategy."⁽⁶⁾ This strategy was evident in the Raisi government's actions. Firstly, the Raisi government provided economic assistance to revive Syria's economy and prevent the government's collapse. Secondly, shortly after assuming office, the Raisi government demanded that the Syrian government settle the debts incurred from Iran's military support during the crisis following the 2011 uprisings. The Raisi government exerted pressure on the Assad government by delaying oil shipments and through the historic visit of the Iranian president to Syria, marking the first such visit since 2011. This visit

generated political momentum, with the Iranian president accompanied by his cabinet members, including the ministers of foreign affairs, oil, defense, communications, roads and urban development. The visit aimed to establish long-term economic agreements that would solidify Iran's influence in Syria.⁽⁷⁾

During his tenure at the helm of Iran's Foreign Ministry, Abdollahi-an's influence was notable in Syria. This was evident in his handling of the Astana talks involving Iran, Russia, Turkey and Syria, and his efforts to counter Turkey's burgeoning influence in Syria while avoiding confrontation with Ankara.

The most significant development in Iran-Syria relations during Raisi's tenure was the increasing military tensions in Syria, as it has become a battleground for the Iran-Israel conflict. During this time, Israel escalated its airstrikes targeting Iranian military sites in Syria, mainly at the airports of Aleppo and Damascus. This resulted in the suspension of flights, affecting the Syrian government's ability to manage its domestic airports. These attacks led to simmering tensions between Tehran and Damascus. Following Operation Al-Aqsa Flood and its unexpected turn of events, tensions between Syria and Iran further intensified. With escalation reaching its peak, Israel targeted a building adjacent to the Iranian embassy in the Damascus area municipality of Mezzeh on April 1, 2024. The airstrike resulted in the killing of

Iranian military commanders, most notably IRGC top commander Mohammad Reza Zahedi. Iran implicitly accused the Syrian government of the attack. As a result, the region witnessed unprecedented military responses between Iran and Israel that could have escalated into a full-scale regional conflict. At the very last moment, Iran and Israel resorted to calculated de-escalation, yet instability is still present.

Bashar al-Assad's Absence From Raisi's Funeral

The Syrian government recently declared three days of national mourning following the helicopter crash that claimed the lives of the Iranian president and foreign minister. This unexpected move signals a notable shift in Syria's foreign policy, showcasing the government's determination to convey profound sympathy to Iran. However, President Assad's absence from the funeral sparked inquiries and speculation. Some argue that his decision to delay his visit to Iran after the funeral implies that tensions persist between the two countries, potentially indicating a shift in Syria's alignment away from Tehran. It seems that Assad has recognized a misalignment between his agenda and Iran's, prioritizing a return to the Arab world while steering clear of engagement with Tehran. Reports of Assad's meeting with US officials and a potential future understanding with Washington have prompted the Biden

administration to postpone the “Assad Regime Anti-Normalization Act.”

Others argue that Assad’s absence from the funeral should not be seen as a sign of underlying tensions in the Iran-Syria alliance. They claim that Syria’s disengagement from Iran could come at a high cost, especially considering the billions of dollars in debts that the Syrian government owes to Iran. Additionally, it is pointed out that given Iran’s substantial influence in Syria in recent years, it may not be feasible for Syria to oppose Iran.

Assessing the Consequences of Raisi’s Demise

Some argue that Iran’s consecutive losses of its prominent military leaders and influential figures orchestrating its foreign policy toward Syria and Lebanon would probably affect Iran’s foreign policy and create a critical juncture in its expansionist project in the region. However, realistically speaking, it is unlikely to witness dramatic changes in Iran’s foreign policy toward regional issues. To accurately assess the implications of the deaths of the Iranian president and foreign minister, one needs to understand the inner workings of Iran’s ruling system and how decisions on foreign policy are made. In the current ruling system in Iran, foreign policy toward the world and the region, including Syria, is managed by the deep state apparatuses, namely the National Security Council, the IRGC, and the supreme leader. The Presidency and Foreign

Ministry are mere executive bodies in this process.

Iran’s long-term geostrategic plans in the region, which rely heavily on Syria and align with the Iranian leadership’s ideology, are expected to remain unchanged despite changes in presidential or foreign ministerial positions. This was evident in a meeting held by Iran with leaders of its affiliated militias in the region. ⁽⁸⁾ Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and IRGC commanders met with leaders representing factions of the “Axis of Resistance” during Raisi’s funeral.

Two weeks after the helicopter crash, President Bashar al-Assad visited Tehran to pay condolences following the death of Raisi and his cabinet members. During the visit, Assad met with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei who implicitly talked about the nature of his country’s present and future relations with Syria. “The unique identity of Syria which is resistance took shape during the rule of the late Hafez al-Assad based on the “front of resistance and resilience” and this identity has contributed to national security in Syria,”⁽⁹⁾ Khamenei said. In his remarks, Khamenei implicitly blamed Bashar al-Assad for steering clear of the path of the “Axis of Resistance.” He also underpinned the role of Iran and its militias in Syria and the “Axis of Resistance” factions in helping Assad address the serious challenges following the 2011 uprisings. And that with the help of Iran, Assad managed to restore relative stability over the areas his government

controls. He also talked about plans of powers from the West and the region to topple the political system in Syria and how they failed to exclude Syria from the regional equation. By such statements, Khamenei explicitly expressed his discontent of the efforts taken by regional and international powers to make Syria deviate from Tehran's regional stratagem.

Conclusion

The absence of the Raisi government would probably generate tangible ramifications for Syria for some time, especially in administrative and symbolic aspects of Syria-Iran relations. The main approach of Iran's foreign

policy toward Syria will mostly remain unchanged. Iran-Syria interactions will remain the same regardless of the potential changes to the Iranian government; whether "reformists" or "hardliners" will take power. Iran's political system will probably keep its disagreement with the Syrian government implicit without taking it to an extreme divergence. Iran would turn a blind eye to Assad's absence at Raisi's funeral. Khamenei's implicit criticism of Assad is not likely to escalate. Iran will continue this path yet with taking into account critical potential developments: the course of Syria-Arab relations and the outcomes of Israel's war on Gaza.

Endnotes

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IRAN'S RELATIONS WITH INTERNATIONAL POWERS

In the context of Iran's interactions with international powers, relations between Washington and Tehran remain tense following Operation Al-Aqsa Flood and the Israeli war on Gaza. Both countries are approaching critical phases with Iran's upcoming presidential election to succeed the late Ebrahim Raisi, and the United States preparing for its own presidential election. These developments are expected to significantly influence US-Iran relations in the coming months.

The main issue to be discussed is:

- The impact of Raisi's death on US-Iran relations.

The Impact of Raisi's Death on US-Iran Relations

The United States and Iran resorted to calm and reached an implicit agreement not to clash and escalate the regional confrontation, as evidenced by the indirect negotiations hosted by the Sultanate of Oman in May 2024. These negotiations focused on how to contain regional tensions and escalation and could have been extended to include other issues, the most important of which is the nuclear file. However, the sudden deaths of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian disrupted the process, leading to a temporary halt in negotiations. Both sides are now waiting for the election of a new president to succeed Raisi, and this wait could extend until the end of the US elections scheduled for November 2024. Given that Iran is strengthening its capabilities aside from international oversight, complications may arise before these electoral deadlines end. Thus, Raisi's death has significantly impacted the fluctuating course of relations, oscillating between calm and confrontation. The ICF for May sheds light on these developments and their impact on relations between the two sides.

Omani Negotiations

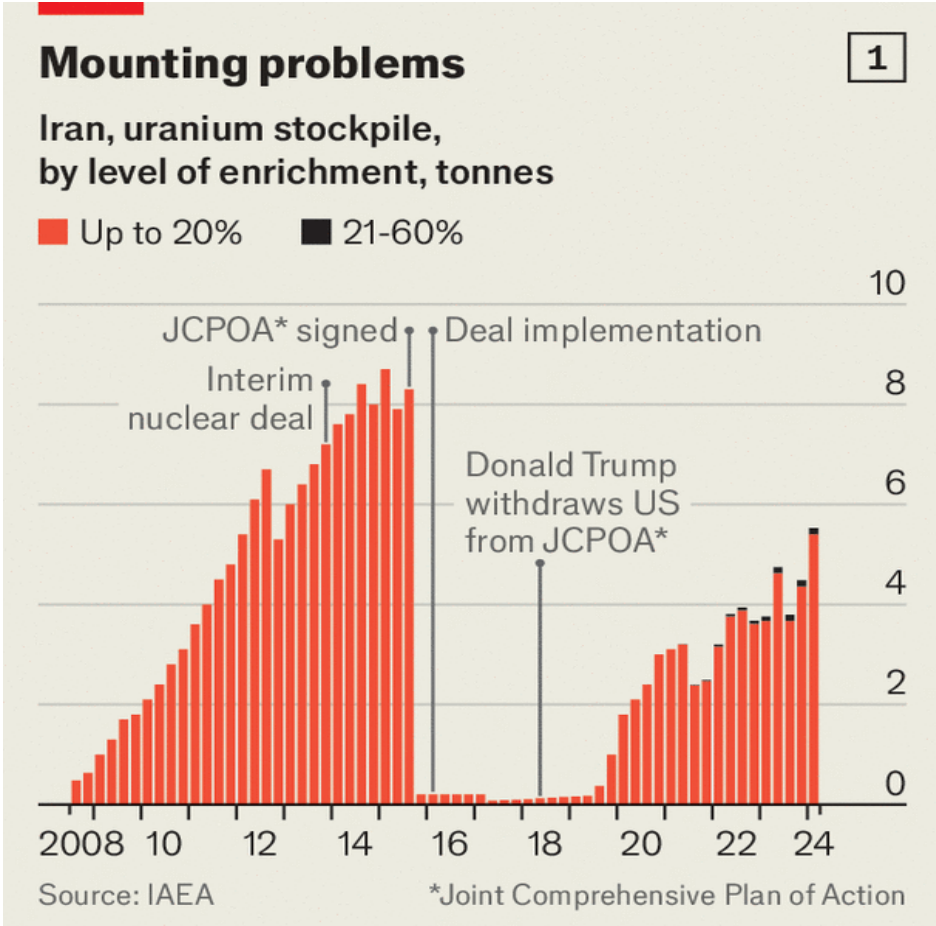
Just days before the incident, Iran had quietly sent a high-level delegation to Oman to hold secret, indirect talks with US officials. The focus of these discussions was on a regional truce, but the deaths of the Iranian president

and foreign minister interrupted the ongoing negotiations, leading to their postponement. It is likely that diplomacy will be stalled until after the Iranian elections when a new president replaces Raisi, potentially continuing until after the US elections at the end of 2024. This delay does not necessarily imply a change in approach from either side. During Raisi's term, the prevailing pattern was hostility, balanced by a willingness to contain escalation in controversial areas, particularly the tense regional situation since October 7 and the nuclear file. Given that Khamenei has significant influence on Iranian foreign policy, the upcoming Iranian elections are not expected to result in a significant change in Iran's approach to dealing with the United States. If the "reformists" come to power, they might ease Tehran's stance towards Washington, but this is unlikely. Khamenei is expected to push for a "hardliner" government to uphold the Iranian republic's strict ideological line towards the United States, which he perceives as the greatest threat to Iran and the political system.⁽¹⁾

Ambiguity Regarding Iran's Nuclear Program and an Opportunity to Buy Time

Despite the visit of the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi to Iran on May 6, 2024, and the announcement of the resumption of negotiations between the IAEA and Iran, two confidential reports issued

Graph 1: The Quantities of Enriched Uranium in Iran Before and After the US Withdrawal From the Nuclear Agreement:



Source: <https://n9.cl/3zpz0>

by the IAEA on May 27, 2024, revealed that Iran is enriching uranium to levels approaching weapons-grade at a steady pace. Meanwhile, discussions to enhance its cooperation with the IAEA have faltered. The IAEA faces numerous challenges in Iran, including the implementation of only a small fraction of the measures that

Grossi believed Iran had committed to in a “joint statement” on cooperation from March 2023.

If an agreement is not reached, at least implicitly, to reduce tensions between Iran and the United States before October 2025, it is likely that one of the European parties to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

(JCPOA) will trigger the rapid return mechanism to prevent the automatic expiration of Resolution 2231's "snapback" provision, which would result in the reimposition of international sanctions on Iran and effectively terminate the nuclear agreement signed between Iran and the P5+1 group in 2015. However, if this action is not taken, the restrictions imposed on Iran will collapse, as the last Western pressure cards on Iran will expire with the snapback mechanism by the end of the year. It appears that Iran is attempting to buy time to reach this critical point in its nuclear program, especially since it is receiving support from China and Russia, which may prevent a unified international stance that could curb its nuclear ambitions. The death of Raisi has given Iran the opportunity to maneuver further and buy time.⁽²⁾

Mutual Hostility and Internal Objections to Biden's Approach

The incident that led to the death of Raisi highlighted the deep-rooted hostility between the United States and Iran. The United States did not

assist Iran in searching for the president's missing helicopter, citing logistical reasons. While the US State Department offered condolences through an official announcement regarding Raisi's death, members of the Senate submitted an inquiry to Secretary of State Antony Blinken about the message of condolence. Meanwhile, Iranian voices accused Washington of indirect responsibility for the helicopter crash, arguing that longstanding US sanctions had prevented Iran from modernizing and maintaining its aircraft fleet for decades.

During a congressional hearing, US representatives sharply criticized Blinken, condemning the Biden administration's perceived laxity in enforcing sanctions on Iran. Lawmakers pointed out that Biden's policy ultimately allowed Iran to restore its oil exports to levels seen before Trump's withdrawal from the nuclear agreement. Iranian production rose from 300,000 barrels per day to 2 million, and Iran managed to operate a naval fleet to export its oil products beyond US oversight. Although Blinken defended the Biden administration's

Key US Sanctions and Pressures on Iran and Its Affiliates in May 2024	
Date	Procedure
May 2	The United States sanctioned five individuals and two entities for their involvement in sanctions evasion, including Hezbollah financial advisor Hassan Muqlad, who had already been listed by the United States.
May 7	The US exerted pressure on Malaysia and Singapore as part of its efforts to halt the services these countries provide to Iran for its oil exports.

Key US Sanctions and Pressures on Iran and Its Affiliates in May 2024	
Date	Procedure
May 18	The United States warned India that its cooperation with Iran might lead to sanctions. This warning, issued by the US State Department, followed the signing of a new agreement between India and Iran to develop the port of Chabahar.
May 31	The US Treasury Department imposed new sanctions related to Iran, targeting four entities and one individual associated with the Iranian Aerospace Industries Organization.
Source: Rasanah Center for Research and Studies	

policy, asserting that sanctions on Iran had increased, the exemptions granted suggested a leniency aimed at reaching a deal. These tensions may escalate with the approaching elections, as both sides attempt to leverage the Iranian issue to enhance their prospects, particularly since Iran and the nuclear file are major points of contention between Republicans and Democrats, and specifically between Trump and Biden.⁽³⁾

Conclusion

It is evident that both the United States and Iran consider maintaining calm a crucial interest at this juncture. Recent understandings have de-escalated the tensions that followed reciprocal Iranian-Israeli attacks. Although the death of Raisi has strained relations and highlighted the underlying hostility between the

two nations, it is likely that relations will remain stable in the near future. Both sides aim to manage their interactions to avoid escalation, especially given the upcoming elections that are significant for both. They hope that stable relations will positively influence their electoral prospects, despite the ongoing threat posed by Iran's nuclear program and its exceeding of permissible uranium enrichment limits. While there is international concern over the diminishing effectiveness of the snapback mechanism, implicit understandings or mediator interventions appear to be limiting escalation and safeguarding minimal interests for both parties. Nonetheless, the potential return of Trump remains a looming threat to the Biden administration's current approach towards Iran.

Endnotes

- (1) عبدالرضا فرجی راد، ماجرای مذاکره مسقط، صحیفه آرمان امروز، (4 خرداد 1403 هـ ش)، تاریخ الاطلاع: 6 یونیو 2023، <https://2u.pw/WElh8Z2i>
- (2) "Iran's New Leaders Stand at a Nuclear Precipice," *The Economist*, May 20, 2024, accessed June 6, 2024, <https://n9.cl/3zpzmo>
- (3) "US Senators Slam Blinken Over Iran Policy 'Disaster,'" *Iran International*, May 21, 2024, accessed June 6, 2024, <https://2u.pw/hI4z6svv>

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