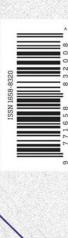


MONTHLY REPORT

Iran Case File







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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2024, Iran experienced significant developments across political, economic, military, social, and ideological domains. Its foreign relations with Arab and international actors were also marked by complex interactions, which are expected to influence Iran's broader foreign policy in the coming period.

Domestically, political controversy resurfaced in Iran after the assassination of Hezbollah's Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah in an Israeli airstrike in the southern suburbs of Beirut, Lebanon. "Conservative hardliners" accused President Masoud Pezeshkian of being responsible for the assassination, claiming that his delay in avenging the killing of Ismail Haniyeh emboldened Israel to target other leaders aligned with Iran's regional agenda. In contrast, the "reformists" defended Pezeshkian. arguing that Iranian interests require patience and that the decision to avenge Haniyeh's death rests with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, not the president.

On the economic front, Iran's banking sector, while formally adhering to Islamic banking principles, faces substantial structural challenges. Interest rates currently stand at 24%, and the sector is plagued by high levels of non-performing loans and recurring security breaches. A recent cyberattack compromised 20 major banks, forcing them to pay millions of dollars in blackmail, while the government attempted to conceal the breach. Additionally, the banking system

suffers from low capital adequacy, corruption, lack of oversight, and failure to meet international standards. These issues have undermined confidence in the financial system, disrupted economic production and growth, and exacerbated social and political unrest.

Militarily, Iran continues to enhance its capabilities and deepen relations with its allies. On September 10, the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Akbar Ahmadian met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Kazan during a BRICS meeting. Additionally, Russian Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin held discussions with the Iranian army's Deputy Commanderin-Chief for Coordination Affairs Rear Admiral Habibullah Savvari during a security forum in Beijing. Sayyari also led a delegation to China to discuss geostrategic issues and the potential acquisition of Chinese military technology. Iran's military advancements were further demonstrated by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) successful launch of the Chamran-1 satellite into a 550-kilometer orbit using the solid-fuel Qaem-100 missile. Amid growing regional threats, calls are emerging in Iran for a shift in its nuclear doctrine. potentially paving the way for nuclear weapons development.

On the social front, the Iranian government's new measures to address the Afghan immigrant crisis — affecting millions of Afghans living in Iran — have encountered significant

moral and symbolic challenges. The issue remains difficult to resolve, especially given conflicting views on how to handle it and the added sensitivity of geographical proximity between Iran and Afghanistan. The assassination of Nasrallah triggered a strong response within the Shiite community, as major Shiite groups, including those in Najaf and Irag's armed factions, mourned his death alongside key religious figures in Qom. In contrast, the response from the Muslim Brotherhood was mixed. Some factions condemned the assassination as an Israeli attempt to suppress Palestinian resistance, while others remained silent. Notably, the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria showed no sympathy for Nasrallah, labeling him a "sectarian criminal."

Iran's foreign relations with Arab and regional actors saw significant developments in September 2024. At the Arab level, particularly in Iranian-Iraqi interactions, pro-Iran militias in Iraq have become increasingly involved in the regional conflict following the escalation between Israel and Hezbollah. These militias carried out several attacks on Israel, targeting areas in the Jordan Valley under Israeli control and the Israeli Golani Brigade observation base drones. According to Israeli sources, the attacks were intercepted without causing any damage. These operations were conducted under the cover of the so-called Islamic Resistance in Iraq, a militia group that emerged during the ongoing Israeli war in Gaza, which has now lasted over a year.

Regarding Iran-Syria relations, Hezbollah maintains a significant military and economic presence in Syria, which it established and consolidated due to its support for the Assad regime during the Syrian conflict that began in 2011. Therefore, the Israeli assassination of Nasrallah represents a major event with potentially significant future implications. Hezbollah's deep presence in Syria, combined with the various gains it has achieved there, has also increased its security vulnerability to the Israeli military. This exposure leaves the party's leadership and infrastructure open to Israeli targeting, casting uncertainty over its presence in Syria and the activities of several militias spread across various regions of the country.

Amid ongoing tensions between Iran and Israel, the region has entered a new phase of escalation. With negotiations between Israel and Hamas at a standstill, the conflict has spread to Lebanon following a major Israeli escalation against Hezbollah. This escalation directly triggered Iran's second missile attack on Israel. As mutual threats between Tehran and Tel Aviv regarding military responses intensify, the risk of a broader regional

war grows, as both sides remain entrenched in their positions, favoring a zero-sum approach.

In terms of Iranian interactions with international powers, the multifront war between Israel and Iran continues to significantly impact US-Iran relations. Despite statements from Pezeshkian expressing his country's readiness to resume nuclear negotiations with Washington, the ongoing regional conflict complicates relations between the two countries. Pezeshkian's efforts to improve Tehran-Washington relations and his calls to restart nuclear talks face numerous challenges that hinder progress.

Regarding Iran-Europe relations, tensions remain dominant. UK. France and Germany jointly announced new punitive measures against Tehran for transferring ballistic missiles to Russia. These three countries imposed sanctions on several Iranian military leaders and froze the assets of the Anzali Free Trade and Industrial Zone. Furthermore, a French court accused two Iranians of involvement in a plot to target Israeli citizens and interests in Germany and France, including an Israeli security company in Paris and individuals in Munich and Berlin.

DEVELOPMENTS IN IRAN'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS

In September 2024, Iran witnessed significant developments across political, economic, military, social, and ideological fronts. The most notable of these developments can be enumerated as follows:

- The assassination of Hassan Nasrallah and the resurgence of divisions between political movements in Iran
- Serious breaches and challenges facing Iran's banking sector
- Iranian efforts to enhance its military capabilities and address security gaps
- The renewed controversy in Iran regarding Afghan immigrants
- Implications of the seminary and Islamist groups' responses to the assassination of Nasrallah.

The Assassination of Hassan Nasrallah and the Surge in <u>Politica</u>l Factionalism in Iran

Political disputes between the "conservatives" and "reformists" resurfaced in September 2024 following the assassination of Hezbollah's Secretary General. Hassan Nasrallah. along with several party leaders, in an Israeli airstrike in the southern suburbs of Beirut, Lebanon, The "hardliners" within the "conservative" faction viewed Nasrallah's assassination as a direct consequence of the delay by Pezeshkian's government in retaliating for the prior assassination of Hamas Political Bureau Chief Ismail Haniyeh, who had been killed in Tehran on May 31, 2024.

In this file, we will discuss the "hardliners'" accusations against Pezeshkian's government regarding the responsibility for Nasrallah's assassination, as well as the "reformists'" stance on the "hardliners'" calls for a response to Israel.

First: The "Hardliners" Blame Pezeshkian's Government for the Assassination

The news of Nasrallah's assassination provoked a wave of denunciations from various political factions in Iran, predominantly from establishment figures aligned with the supreme leader and the institutions under his oversight. The "hardliners" among them called for immediate retaliation in response to his killing.

Conversely, Nasrallah's assassination — along with the deaths of several party leaders and Brigadier General Abbas Nilforushan, the deputy commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' (IRGC) operations sparked a renewed round of debate among political factions within the Iranian establishment. The "hardliners" in the "conservative" camp seized upon this incident to levy criticism against Pezeshkian through state media, other outlets, and social networks. Pezeshkian also faced censure from supporters of the recent presidential election loser Saeed Jalili, including a member of the Iranian Parliament's National Security Committee Abolfazl Zohrevand who stated in an interview with Iranian television, "If Saeed Jalili were president, Israel would perhaps not dare to act so boldly." The criticisms directed at Pezeshkian escalated to the point where he was held responsible for the events surrounding Nasrallah's assassination, with claims that his hesitance in avenging Haniyeh's murder emboldened Israel to undertake further assassinations of figures associated with the Iranian establishment.(1)

In addition to the "hardliners," several "moderates" indirectly accused Pezeshkian's government. Among them was former Iranian Parliament member Ali Motaheri, who posted, "America has deceived us, sending us repeated messages claiming it would achieve a ceasefire in Gaza." This statement referred to promises made

by several Western officials, who assured the Iranian side of a ceasefire in Gaza in exchange for not responding to Haniyeh's assassination. The "hardliners" sought to exploit Motaheri's statements to accuse the government of being misled by these assurances, which ultimately empowered Israel to take the lives of more influential leaders in the service of advancing Iranian interests.

Second: The "Reformists'" Stance on Calls for Responding to Israel

On the other hand, some government supporters and individuals close to the "reformists" contended that the decision on retaliation for Haniyeh's assassination, according to the Constitution, rests with Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, not the president. They praised Iran's choice to refrain from escalating the conflict.

The Spokesperson for the Iranian Reform Front Jawad Emam urged the "hardliners" to hold security officials accountable regarding Haniyeh's assassination to address concerns about Israel's penetration and influence within Iranian security apparatuses. (3) Given the control of the IRGC and the "conservative" faction over Iran's security apparatuses, it is unlikely that the "hardliners" will heed these demands.

In a post, "reformist" figure Mohammad Ali Abtahi, who served as Vice President during Khatami's administration, stated, "In light of the extremist remarks from the "hardliners" calling for war, or negative

statements that portray a weakness in Iran, the best course of action is to adhere to the supreme leader's views, who has demonstrated himself to be a revolutionary leader of great intelligence, prioritizing the interests of the Iranian people. We have witnessed this wisdom during the Israel-Gaza conflict."⁽⁴⁾

Abtahi's remarks underscore the "reformists" endorsement of non-intervention in the Gaza conflict, citing the necessity of safeguarding Iranian interests, particularly in averting Israeli attempts to embroil Iran in that war. This position appears to have endured even following the assassination of Hezbollah's Secretary General Nasrallah. The New York Times reported, citing Iranian sources, that upon confirmation of Nasrallah's assassination, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei convened a meeting of the Supreme National Security Council at his residence to contemplate a response. However, a consensus regarding a unified stance on the Israeli operation did not materialize, with "conservative" members, including Saeed Jalili, advocating for swift retaliation against Israel to mitigate escalation and its potential spillover into Iran. In contrast, Pezeshkian, supported by the "reformists," opposed the notion of attacking Israel, arguing that any hasty action "would provide the Israeli prime minister with a perfect pretext to draw Iran into a larger war,"(5) expressing concerns that Israel could successfully involve the United States in the conflict, backed by certain European nations sympathetic to Israel and angry toward Iran for its support of Russia in the Ukraine war.

Conclusion

The criticisms aimed at Pezeshkian's government by the "hardliners" failed to resonate, even among other "conservatives," who remained largely silent in response, recognizing that the establishment's overall position regarding the conflict supports the government's cautious approach to avoid being drawn into a broader confrontation with Israel and the United States. The missile strikes launched by Iran against Israel were not merely a response to these criticisms, but rather an urgent necessity for the Iranian establishment to counter Israeli aggression, which has emerged as a significant threat to its existence and future

Serious Breaches and Challenges to the Banking Sector in Iran

The September 2024 Economic File sheds light on the state of Iran's banking sector, after it was subjected to serious large-scale breaches, resulting in a precipitous loss of public confidence in the banking system and the economy as a whole. This necessitates analysis across three axes. The first sheds light on the nature and reality of the banking sector in Iran and its relevance to the principles of Islamic economics. The second addresses the major challenges facing the sector. The third discusses the possible

consequences for the economy if the country's financial system collapses.

First: A Brief Overview of Iran's Financial Sector

The importance of banks in the financial system of any economy lies in their primary role in attracting deposits and channeling funds to finance various economic activities such as investment and development. Banking services have been in place in Iran since ancient times when services were offered through temples. This practice continued in various forms until banks were officially established in Iran at the beginning of the 20th century.

The Iranian republic inherited a group of major banks from the shah's era. They were nationalized after the revolution and converted to Islamic banks based on principles such as murabaha, joint investment, leasing and other principles of Islamic banking without interest. These precepts were never meaningfully implemented but were only stated on paper. Their terminologies have been subjected to change over the years. In addition, the Iranian banking system did not fully adopt Islamic banking regulations. High interest rates are still offered to depositors in the range of 23% -24%, while this amounted to 30% in some years due to high inflation rates and exceeded more than 50% in recent years. Whether the banking system conforms with Islamic principles or not is the subject of heated debate among Iranian jurists. Some argue that it is not an Islamic system given the practice of charging interest.

Iran currently has dozens of major state-owned and private banks, as well as hundreds of financial institutions, some of which are informal, providing banking services such as deposits and financing and non-banking services such as insurance, because of the limited role of Iran's capital market in attracting capital.

Iranian studies indicate that about 81% of funding across various sectors in the country comes from banks. This highlights the importance of the banking system for the Iranian economy. Iran has a wide range of private and public financial institutions as well as by sovereign institutions such as the IRGC and mutual funds. There are hundreds of financial and credit institutions across the country that provide banking services such as loans, money transfers, remittances, and insurance. These play an important role in circumventing the sanctions imposed on the banking system. There are also interest-free funds for microfinance.

Second: Major Challenges Facing the Banking Sector

Iran's banking sector faces key structural challenges, such as the following:

1. Non-performing loans: this means that borrowers are unable to repay their loans for many reasons: lax lending practices, banks' poor risk assessment and borrowers' sudden financial distress due to crises facing

the economy, whether because of domestic factors or external risks, such as the impact of sanctions on Iran or global crises. Borrowers deliberately do not pay back their loans by taking advantage of legal and administrative loopholes and government facilities for defaulters; this is exacerbated by the difficulty in enforcing judicial procedures for the recovery of non-performing loans.

- 2. Breach and theft of banking data: Cyberattacks have occasionally hit Iranian financial institutions and systems. Recently. 20 Iranian financial institutions were hit by a massive cyberattack in mid-August, disrupting their operations and forcing them to shut down ATMs by a hacking group known as IRLeaks. It hacked other Iranian firms too. The group demanded \$10 million in return for not releasing the personal accounts and credit card data of millions of Iranians. Some Iranian firms succumb to such threats like the company Tosan which paid at least \$3 million in a bid to allay the concerns of its customers.
- 3. Low capital adequacy ratio: studies have shown that only one among all Iranian banks has an adequate capital adequacy ratio as per the requirements of the Basel III Accord, which signals a structural imbalance in the Iranian banking sector.
- 4. Accumulation of government loans: Iranian banks are the largest state lenders and are therefore saddled with loans. These banks are obliged to lend to the government. The Iranian government's debt has

piled up, amounting to 28.5% last year (2023/2024) and will likely increase further. Thus, the risk of bankruptcy in the event of a government default increases with the continuous growth of the budget deficit.

- 5. Weak financial and banking indicators: Iran ranked 104th in financial system resilience and 122nd in banking system resilience in 2017/2018.
- 6. Lack of compliance with international standards: poor compliance with credit rating standards, supervision and assessment of credit risks of borrowers, and the enactment of relevant legislation. This is likely evident in Iran's refusal to comply with the regulations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) for combating money laundering and terrorist financing. It was blacklisted like North Korea.
- 7. Inflation and macroeconomic instability: periods of economic instability, including international sanctions and inflation, have undermined the ability of the banking system to operate effectively, creating challenges to set effective prices on interest rates or yields on deposits and lending, disrupting the fundamental mechanisms of the banking sector.
- 8. Corruption and lack of supervision: the lack of adequate supervision and compliance with the laws of the central bank and regulatory authorities leads to corruption. Some financial institutions take advantage of their influence, such as the IRGC, to evade scrutiny and conduct high-risk financial activities that threaten depositors' funds and the entire system.

Third: Impact on the Iranian Economy

The banking system is the backbone of financial stability. Financial security acquires greater significance in an economy that has been battered by inflation and international sanctions. Citizens require a cashless system so they can transact without carrying large amounts of money. They also need appropriate and safe savings facilities through banks to compensate for high inflation. Savings can also be mobilized to boost investment and economic development as the economy suffers from sanctions that have reduced growth and production and have stopped foreign investment. Therefore, the persistent or exacerbating challenges to the Iranian banking system may entail extremely serious economic, social and political consequences as follows:

- 1. The erosion of confidence in the financial system: Because of weak technical infrastructure, the recurrence of cyberattacks, security breaches, data theft or the threat of bank fraud, public confidence in the security and stability of the banking system has been eroded.
- 2. Disruption of production and economic growth: the erosion of confidence in the financial system leads to the leakage of funds from the banking sector and the lack of essential funds to finance investment and production operations, the deterioration of economic growth, and the increase of unemployment and inflation. This is similar to Lebanon, adversely af-

fecting the Lebanese economy and the value of the Lebanese currency.

- 3. Financial extortion: recurring cases of breaches expose banking institutions and customers to financial extortion by hackers, as was the case last month with 20 Iranian banks, threatening the stability of the financial system.
- 4. The risk of bankruptcy: the accumulation of non-performing loans and government debt on banks exacerbates the risk of bankruptcy. Banks become more vulnerable to any economic or political shocks.
- 5. Social and political unrest: the erosion of popular confidence in any banking system sparks protests and social unrest, destabilizing the government. Indeed, the adverse economic and living conditions endured by the Iranian people give rise to a society which is ready to mobilize in the hope of a better future.

Conclusion

The Iranian banking system suffers from serious structural challenges and serious security flaws that undermine its stability and threaten economic stability as a whole if the Iranian government does not put an end to these problems. This is not easy due to external factors such as economic sanctions, but most factors are internal related to the political and economic policies of the ruling establishment. This has led to financial practices creating an appropriate environment for corruption, increasing credit risk and weakening the re-

silience of the financial and banking system as well as creating a gaping chasm in compliance with international standards.

Iranian Efforts to Develop Its Military Capabilities and Plug Security Gaps

Iran's quest to cement military relations with its allies and enhance the capabilities of its armed forces continues unabated. Tehran successfully launched the second military satellite into orbit, and established a new strategic military base. It also pursues proactive military diplomacy with partner countries. Its military and security officials also visited Russia and China.

First: Iran Launches New Satellite and Calls to Change Nuclear Doctrine

The IRGC launched a satellite named Chamran-1 into orbit at an altitude of 550 kilometers, via solid rocket, Qaim-100, on September 14, 2024. The success of the IRGC's second orbital mission via the Oaim satellite launch vehicle highlights Iran's prioritization of its military space program. The IRGC launched the Soraya satellite into a 750-kilometer orbit with the Qaim-100 satellite launch vehicle last January. This development took place not only at the height of tensions in the Middle East, but also in defiance of tightening Western sanctions.

Chamran-1 was declared a research satellite for testing hardware and soft-

ware systems as well as maneuvering techniques in orbit. This move by Iran elicited widespread expressions of concern as it is believed that the program is only a cover for improving Iran's long-range missile capabilities.

Regarding calls for the pursuit of nuclear weapons, the narrative of nuclear deterrence is gaining momentum publicly and in the Iranian media. Jawan newspaper recently raised the issue of revising Iran's nuclear doctrine by withdrawing from its commitment to the peaceful use of nuclear technology amid tensions with Israel. This newspaper claimed that Tehran now has the ability, justification and opportunity for an immediate transformation in this program.

The most vocal proponent of achieving nuclear weapons capability was former Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi who stated last May, "if they dare to strike Iranian nuclear facilities, our level of deterrence will change. If they intend to strike Iranian nuclear capabilities, naturally, it would lead to a change in Iran's nuclear doctrine."

MP Ahmad Ardestani stated, "Iran possesses nuclear weapons, but we do not announce it. It means our policy is to possess nuclear bombs, but our declared policy is currently within the framework of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action." Alarmingly, the thinking in Iran's strategic community signals the development of the country's advanced ballistic missile program.

Second: The Inauguration of a New Air Base in Urmia

IRGC commander Major General Hossein Salami inaugurated the Martyr Major General Mahmoudabadi Airbase in the city of Urmia, the capital of Iran's West Azerbaijan Province. Brigadier General Ali Akbar Pourjamshidian, deputy interior minister for security affairs, said during the ceremony that the opening of the new airbase aims at strengthening Iran's defense capabilities, adding that this step will be fruitful for the country and its military forces.

Salami stressed during the inauguration of the base that "Iran is facing threats in its northwest from enemies and elements opposed to the Islamic Revolution." Tehran had assigned this military facility to monitor Iranian Kurdish opposition groups in Iraq, the expanded borders of Azerbaijan after the independence of Nagorno-Karabakh, and the Nakhichevan exclave bordering Turkey. Tehran's decision to establish the base is considered necessary because Azerbaijan will likely seize the Zangezur corridor, cutting off Armenia's inland communication with Iran. Iran has conducted frequent joint exercises, expressing bewilderment at Azerbaijani-Turkish plans to create a land route.

Even after the liberation of Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan never stopped modernizing its armed forces with Israeli and Turkish military equipment and satellites. Baku received the first batch of fourth-generation JF-17 Thunder fighters last

September from Pakistan, which are produced in cooperation with China.

Third: Military Diplomacy Between Iran and Russia

Russia and Iran have intensified interactions after the spillover of the conflict in the Middle East. The Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Akbar Ahmadian met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Kazan on the sidelines of the BRICS meeting on September 10. his Russian counterpart Sergei Shoigu also attended the meeting. He focused on common bilateral security interests and threats. A follow-up meeting was held with Alexander Lavrentiev. Putin's special envoy for Syria. The two allies are seeking to develop a joint strategy to tackle sanctions and the conflict in Ukraine amid strikes against Hezbollah in Lebanon. Russia's Deputy Minister of Defense Alexander Fomin also held talks with the Iranian's army's Coordinating Deputy Admiral Habibollah Sayyari on the sidelines of a security forum in Beijing. The two sides discussed the security of the Caspian Sea, which Sayyari called the "sea of peace and friendship" and reviewed the Russia- Ukraine war and the state of bilateral arms transfers. Tehran attaches further importance to its borders on the Caspian Sea because of the perceived threat from Israel through its ally Azerbaijan.

Fourth: Iranian Military Delegation Visits China

Sayyari led a delegation to China to hold talks on geostrategic issues and

prospects for possessing Chinese military technology. Sayyari addressed an Army Research Institution and the National University of Defense Technology of China, highlighting critical defense and security challenges. He also attended the Beijing Xiangshan Forum. Tehran courts Beijing to sell J-10C fighter jets, warplanes and submarines. However. China is hesitant over this deal. China is Iran's largest trading partner and an oil importer. Sayyari participated in discussions on various security issues and addressed the internal and external dimensions as well as the current geopolitical landscape in the West Asian region.

Conclusion

US sanctions and the concern of dragging Iran into a regional war have driven Iran to continue its efforts to develop its military relations with its allies and enhance its military capabilities. In light of the developments in the region and the risks Iran may face, especially from Israel, voices have emerged calling for a change in the Iranian nuclear doctrine, which is an explicit call for the Iranian establishment to possess nuclear weapons.

The Afghan Migrant Debate Reemerges in Tehran

The issue of Afghan migrants in Iran has intensified, presenting a range of economic, cultural, security, health, educational, and demographic challenges. This situation necessitates that the government adopts a firm stance and implements effective policies to

address these concerns. However, the application of these decisions has highlighted the depth of the crisis due to the controversy surrounding restrictions preventing Afghans from accessing certain services that are exclusively reserved for Iranians. This has posed additional challenges for the government in addressing this dilemma. In this month's Social File, we discuss the deepening complexity of the Afghan migrant issue in Iran and the government's stance in this regard.

First: The Deepening Complexity of the Afghan Migrant Issue in Iran

Signs reading "Foreigners are prohibited from buying bread" in a district in Kerman Province has sparked widespread debate in Iran. This has led to accusations that the country is depriving Afghan refugees of bread and pressuring them to leave Iranian territory. Some bakeries in the Bardasir district displayed these signs at their entrances following a decision issued by the district attorney. However, the attorney rejected these allegations, stating that this matter "only pertains to bakeries supplying subsidized bread in the city to prevent congestion at the bakeries and does not include the three bakeries located within the camp." Additionally, due to the prohibition on the presence of foreigners in the city and the availability of subsidized bread, which meets their needs, Afghan foreigners do not need to visit other bakeries in the city. As for non-subsidized bread, there are no restrictions. The district attorney in Bardasir ordered the removal of all signs that incited this controversy, clarifying that they did not accurately reflect the complete decision. (6)

This incident has reignited the ongoing debate surrounding the issue of undocumented immigrants and refugees in Iran, particularly Afghans, whose unofficial statistics indicate their numbers range between 13-15 million. This situation has arisen due to the Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan and the policies of the previous government led by the late Ebrahim Raisi, which included officials advocating for increasing the number of Afghan migrants in Iran. (7) Conversely, the overwhelming majority of Iranian voices oppose their presence, citing a range of security, economic, health, educational, and cultural threats.(8)

Second: The Government's Position on the Issue

To tackle the Afghan migrant issue under President Masoud Pezeshkian's administration, it was essential to revise existing immigration policies and introduce new ones that reflect the country's current circumstances. In a press conference, President Pezeshkian stated that Tehran would "respectfully" return all undocumented migrants to their countries. (9) Among the most significant amendments announced on September 4, 2024(10), was the "Law to Reduce the Number of Foreign Nationals." This law, which

imposes extensive restrictions on foreign nationals across Iran, focuses on the limited distribution of Afghan migrants among Iranian provinces, reducing foreign national access, imposing a fee for residence renewals, and limiting work opportunities for them. This law is part of a project prepared by the Iranian Parliament in this regard.(11) It is aimed at decreasing the number of "foreign nationals" living in Iran by 10% percent annually. The draft law obliges real estate agents to verify individuals' residency documents when drafting contracts involving foreign citizens, warning that contracts that are unverified or not registered in the country's real estate transaction system will result in a monetary penalty for the offender. (12) Furthermore, to control the influx of Afghan migrants, the government, in coordination with the army's ground forces, has constructed over 10 kilometers of wall along the border with Afghanistan and is prepared to build an additional 50 kilometers. This issue has garnered attention from the Supreme National Security Council and the supreme leader, with the top police official stating that the deportation campaign targets undocumented migrants. (13) In conjunction with increasing restrictions imposed by the Iranian government on Afghan migrants, the Tehran Company for Industries and Business Organization recently prohibited Afghan street vendors from selling their goods in public areas. Saeed Beigi, the CEO of this organization, declared that any

transaction involving migrants is considered a crime and that employing any Afghan without a permit or work card will result in a fine for the employer, along with their terminationandarrest. (14)

Conclusion

In light of the renewed debate regarding the Afghan migrant crisis in Iran, numerous challenges are anticipated for Pezeshkian's government. It will be compelled to adopt stringent measures to mitigate this crisis and implement policies and legislation aimed at addressing this issue. However, despite these efforts, fully containing the problem will be challenging due to its deeply rooted external causes and the geographical proximity that makes Iran a destination for Afghan refugees — either as a temporary residence or a transit point to other countries.

Hassan Nasrallah's Assassination: Significations of the Positions of the Hawza and Islamists

The assassination of Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah in an Israeli airstrike on the southern suburbs of Beirut on September 27 has raised numerous questions regarding the future not just of Hezbollah, but also of Shiite political Islamic movements and factions, as well as the relationship between the hawza and the party. Despite differences in ideology between Najaf and these factions, the highest religious authority publicly mourned Nasrallah in an official

statement, signaling significant implications that are explored further. Below, we outline the key positions within the hawza and the Shiite community regarding Nasrallah's assassination and its reflection on Shiite collective consciousness.

First: The Marjaya and the Jihad al-Kafai (Jihad as a Collective Obligation) Fatwa

Just days before Nasrallah's death, the Shiite religious hierarchy (marjaya) in Naiaf issued a statement condemning the Israeli aggression against Lebanon. The statement read, "The marjaya calls for all possible efforts to halt this ongoing barbaric aggression and to protect the Lebanese people from its devastating effects, urging the faithful to alleviate their suffering and meet their humanitarian needs."(15) Despite its brevity. this statement was widely interpreted within Shiite circles as akin to the fatwa of jihad al-kafai, which established the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) to confront the Islamic State (ISIS). Commenting on Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's call for efforts to stop the assault on Lebanon, the head of the PMF Faleh al-Favvad announced the organization's readiness to provide all possible assistance to "our brothers in Lebanon."(16)

Following Nasrallah's assassination in the southern suburbs of Beirut, Sistani also mourned him, referring to him as "the eminent scholar and Hujjat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (proof of Islam and Muslims), Sayyid Hassan

Nasrallah. (17)" These remarks highlight Nasrallah's scholarly credentials and commitment to knowledge, suggesting that the hawza was commemorating him in this regard. Additionally, Sistani praised Nasrallah for supporting Iraqis in their fight against ISIS, "He was a rare leadership model in recent decades, playing a distinguished role in the victory over the Israeli occupation by liberating Lebanese territories and supporting the Iraqis in their struggle against ISIS terrorists. He took significant positions in advocating for the oppressed Palestinian people, ultimately sacrificing his life for this cause." However, the hawza simultaneously ignored contentious points between itself and Nasrallah, as the mourning process was not considered to be a suitable time for differences to be aired.

Second: Shiite Islamist Movements

Most Shiite Islamist and armed factions in Iraq mourned Nasrallah, viewing him as a symbol of resistance. Muqtada al-Sadr referred to him as "a comrade on the path of resistance and rejection!"(18)

The Iraqi Kata'ib Hezbollah described him as "the righteous servant, the courageous leader, the Sayyid (chief commander) of resistance, and its knight, Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah." (19) Notably, however, statements issued by several resistance factions did not mobilize their supporters or encourage them to go to Lebanon and join Hezbollah's ranks, as they had

during the Syrian civil war or the war against ISIS. This suggests that the actions of these military factions are not haphazard or purely spontaneous but are, instead, guided by Iranian directives and the prevailing trend of either de-escalation or escalation, as they consider themselves "soldiers of the Guardian Jurist."

Third: The Muslim Brotherhood's Internal Dispute Over Nasrallah

The various factions of the Muslim Brotherhood diverged in their positions regarding Nasrallah's assassination. The London branch, represented by Munir and Abdel Haqq, officially mourned Nasrallah and stated, "The Brotherhood affirms that the assassination of resistance leaders is part of tightening the noose around Palestine. The Brotherhood asserts that resisting the Israeli occupation is a right and a duty for every Muslim everywhere until all of Palestine is liberated."[20]

In contrast, the faction led by Mahmoud Hussein has remained silent and has not paid tribute to Nasrallah on its official platform. The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria referred to his death as "the demise of the sectarian criminal." [21] Meanwhile, Hamas characterized the assassination as "a complete act of terrorism." These disagreements stem from differing strategic interests among the various factions within the Muslim Brotherhood and their relationships with Iran.

Fourth: The Future of Shiite Islamism

Shiite Islamist movements are currently facing a significant crisis marked by a sense of defeat and the shrinking of the project they have pursued for decades. They are confronted with challenging choices: carrying out thorough internal reassessments within their factions and communities, facing potential splits among their ranks, maintaining operations within the Iranian political sphere as Tehran's influence wanes, or retreating to a traditional interpretation of Shiite Islam that distances itself from political engagement. It seems that Iran has recognized this growing discontent among its base, both domestically and abroad, and has moved to address it, seeking to bolster its legitimacy by launching ballistic missile strikes against Israeli cities on October 1. (22) While it is premature to declare the end of the Iranian project in the region, it is indeed entering a phase of decline. Consequently, Iran is striving to consolidate and restore its influence in light of the series of setbacks it has faced along with its foreign affiliates, which undoubtedly impacts the supreme leader personally and his control over the Shiite community.

Conclusion

The assassination of Nasrallah has seemingly united the Shiite community, with mourning expressed by Najaf, armed factions in Iraq, and scholars in Qom. However, it places the

Iranian project in the region under significant strain, exposing it to considerable losses on intellectual, ideological, military and political levels. Despite the rifts between Najaf and the Iranian authorities, they acknowledge Nasrallah's popularity within Shite circles as a "resistant" figure against Israel and "takfiris," as characterized in contemporary Shite discourse. Therefore, the religious authority was keen to pay tribute to him

and hold memorial services for him in Najaf, with rumors suggesting he would be buried in Karbala next to the shrine of Imam Hussain — an honor of great significance in Shiite tradition. Thus, the religious authority aligned itself with the Shiite base that felt the depth of the crisis and the affront to the dignity of the Shiite community following Nasrallah's assassination.

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IRAN-ARAB INTERACTIONS

Iran's relations with some Arab and regional countries are also undergoing significant changes. In Iraq, the most notable development this month is the involvement of Iraqi militias loyal to Iran in the broader regional conflict. In Syria, the assassination of Hezbollah's secretary-general is expected to have major repercussions on the Syrian landscape. Meanwhile, the conflict between Iran and Israel has reached its peak following a missile attack launched by Tehran the largest of its kind — after Israel's assassination of Nasrallah. As Israel threatens to retaliate, global fears mount that this escalation could lead to a war that endangers the entire region.

We will explore Iran's interactions with Arab and regional countries through the following key areas:

- The repercussions of militia involvement in Iraq's regional conflict
- The assassination of Nasrallah and its impact on the Syrian situation
- Military confrontation between Iran and Israel following Nasrallah's assassination.

The Repercussions of Iraqi Militia Involvement in the Regional Conflict

After the decline of attacks by Iranaligned militias in Iraq, following US threats of retaliation for the Iraqi Hezbollah militia's attack that resulted in the deaths of three American soldiers at a military base in Jordan near the Jordanian-Syrian-Iraqi border in early 2024, these militias have once again become involved in the regional conflict. This involvement escalated during the heightened conflict between Israel and Lebanese Hezbollah, with the militias under the name Islamic Resistance in Iraq launching several attacks against Israel in September 2024. These attacks targeted areas in the Jordan Valley under Israeli control and the Israeli Golani Brigade's observation base using drones, which Israel intercepted with no reported damage.

First: Renewed Militia Intervention in the Regional Conflict — Contributing Factors

The resumption of militia involvement in the ongoing regional conflict, alongside Lebanese Hezbollah, may come as part of Iranian directives to provide support to the group, which has been heavily impacted by Israeli strikes. These strikes began with the bombing of Hezbollah's communication systems, disrupting its operations, and culminated in the assassination of many of its political, military and intelligence leaders, including Secretary-General Hassan

Nasrallah and Hashem Safi al-Din. This has weakened Hezbollah significantly, throwing its leadership and organizational structure into disarray.

Hezbollah, long considered the jewel of Iran's military influence and its strongest military arm in the Middle East, is now facing unprecedented fragility. Iran understands that the further weakening of Hezbollah, combined with its initial inability to respond to the assassination of Ismail Haniyeh on Iranian soil, would negatively affect Iran's standing in other areas of influence. This comes after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly emphasized Israel's ability to strike any party threatening its security, hinting at the possibility of targeting Iran directly.

Amid discontent among militias across Iran's spheres of influence over Iran's lack of response, Tehran recognized the need to retaliate. In response, it launched more than 200 ballistic missiles at Israel and encouraged its militias to escalate their attacks against Israel. This strategy fits within Iran's broader narrative of unifying its regional "resistance" fronts, with Iraqi militias playing a supporting role in this conflict. These actions also serve as a message to Israel, demonstrating Iran's ability to open multiple fronts and threaten Israeli security. Notably, the Iraqi Hezbollah Brigades announced their full readiness to fight alongside Lebanese Hezbollah if Israel launched an attack on the southern suburbs of Beirut.

The statement read, "We in the Islamic Resistance, the Hezbollah Brigades, place all our capabilities in the hands of our brothers in Lebanon, and we are fully prepared to go with them to the end, sending fighters, equipment, and support, whether on a technical or logistical level." This explicit announcement gives Israel justification to target these militias in Iraq, claiming it is acting in self-defense.

Second: Repercussions of Militia Involvement on the Iraqi Interior

The involvement of Iraqi militias in the regional conflict drags Iraq — already burdened with complex crises - into destructive wars in which it has no direct stake. This would place the Iraqi army in a difficult position if it were forced to respond to Israeli retaliatory strikes targeting militias in Iraq. Several sources have revealed that Israel has identified 35 targets in Iraq, including prominent political and militia leaders, similar to its strikes in Lebanon.(2) This could escalate into a war, further entangling the Iraqi army in the defense of the state, although this scenario remains unlikely. In either case, Iraq stands to lose, and its internal crises will only worsen, potentially leading to wider conflict.

Iraq's prime minister is fully aware of the potential consequences if Israel launches strikes against militias inside Iraq. He has been intensifying diplomatic efforts, engaging with the United States, the UK and France to pressure Israel to refrain from

launching strikes on Iraqi soil. Some reports suggest that the prime minister has also assigned influential political and religious figures to press militia leaders to distance themselves from the conflict during this sensitive period. (3) This reflects the government's deep concern over the possibility of deeper militia involvement in the conflict with Israel, which could have severe consequences for Iraq's stability.

Three: Definition of the Islamic Resistance in Iraq

The Islamic Resistance in Iraq is essentially an informal umbrella network of militias which emerged around the time of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood about a year ago. Several Iran-aligned militias, such as the Iraqi Hezbollah Brigades, Harakat al-Nujaba and the Savvid al-Shuhada Brigades, fall under this name. All three of these militias are subject to US sanctions. By announcing attacks on Israel or US targets under this name, these militias aim to obscure their identity, making it difficult for US or Israeli forces to pinpoint specific groups responsible for attacks. This technique, which Iran has frequently used, relies on front organizations to hide the involvement of Iranian forces or their allied militias when necessary.

Conclusion

The actions of armed militias in Iraq, violating the sovereignty of the Iraqi state to serve Iranian interests and becoming embroiled in the ongoing

conflict with Israel, pose a grave threat to Iraq's future. Countries that permit the unchecked proliferation of weapons and the violation of national sovereignty will inevitably face threats to their security and stability. Such nations become vulnerable to external aggression and conflict.

The Assassination of Hassan Nasrallah and the Repercussions on the Syrian Scene

There is no doubt that Hezbollah's recent setbacks in its confrontation with Israel, culminating in the assassination of its Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah on September 27, 2024, will have wide-reaching consequences across the region, particularly on the Syrian scene. This event affects the alliance between the Syrian government, Hezbollah and Iran, as Syrian President Bashar al-Assad loses one of his most important allies in the military and political arenas. In this context, several questions arise about the impact of this event on Hezbollah's presence in Syria, where it holds significant influence across multiple governorates, and the implications for Assad's government during the operations targeting Hezbollah. Additionally, this raises questions about Hezbollah's future in Syria.

First: The Assassination of Hezbollah Leaders and Syrian Intervention

There is a general consensus among analysts that the assassination of Nasrallah and other Hezbollah leaders resulted from the party's infiltration and security exposure. One major factor contributing to this vulnerability was Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian conflict since 2011 and the expansion of its operations on Syrian territory. The intertwining of Hezbollah's cadres and leaders with Iranian militias, the Syrian army and Russian forces across Syria weakened its internal security mechanisms, allowing Israeli intelligence to penetrate the party's operations. This overlap between the Lebanese and Syrian arenas was viewed by the Israeli government as Hezbollah's "Achilles' heel," enabling Tel Aviv to infiltrate the group after its secret structure had remained secure fordecades.(4)

Second: Repercussions of Israeli Escalation on Syria's Military Situation

In light of the blows Hezbollah has suffered, including the assassination of Nasrallah and other top leaders, there are questions about how these developments will affect Hezbollah's presence and operations in Syria. Specifically, the party may rely more on its network of military, economic and logistical supply routes established during the ongoing Syrian conflict since 2011. This situation raises the possibility that Hezbollah could redeploy its forces from Lebanon to Syria, prompting Israel to escalate its operations in Syria. Israel could target Hezbollah leaders or its infrastructure, similar to its previous operation against the Scientific Research Center in Masyaf and other military sites. (5)

The assassination of Nasrallah coincided with the Israeli bombing of Syrian army positions near Kfar Yabous on the border with Lebanon, and an infantry company near the 10th Division of the Syrian army. This reflects Israel's strategy to cut off Hezbollah's potential supply routes through Syria and prevent the group from compensating for its losses in the war. Israel also aims to close off any threats emanating from southern Syria. (6)

Third: Timing of the Assassination and Assad's Position

Nasrallah's assassination occurred at a sensitive time for Syria, as the Assad government was working to stabilize its internal affairs and rebuild its relationships with Arab and regional countries. The assassination also coincided with fears of renewed conflict and escalation in Syria after a period of relative calm. Israeli threats had already escalated, peaking two weeks before Nasrallah's assassination when Israel launched a major strike on the Scientific Research Center in Masyaf, destroying the Hair Abbas factory, where drones and guided missiles were reportedly manufactured under Iranian supervision.

The timing of the assassination, combined with Assad's internal and external considerations, was reflected in his delayed response. His official statement of condolence came three days after the assassination, and the diplomatic and media reactions were

notably muted. This is consistent with Assad's broader strategy of distancing himself from supporting Hamas or mourning the deaths of other Hezbollah or Iranian leaders killed by Israel in recent months. Assad seems keen to avoid opening a new military front with Israel. However, his position may become untenable if Israel continues escalating its operations in both Syria and Lebanon. There are also reports of preparations by Iranian militias in Syria for possible Israeli escalations, as well as the entry of fighters from the Popular Mobilization Forces and the Houthis into southern Syria, (7) possibly to distract Israeli forces and force them to engage on multiple fronts.

Conclusion

The assassination of Nasrallah marks a significant escalation by Israel in its confrontation with Iran and its regional influence. This event will have major repercussions on Hezbollah's and Iranian militias' positioning in Syria, as well as on the Syrian government's response to potential future escalations between Israel and Hezbollah.

The Military Confrontation Between Iran and Israel After the Assassination of Nasrallah

Iranian missile attacks on Israel have reignited the issue of deterrence, following a series of Israeli operations against Iran and its proxies in the region, particularly Hezbollah in Lebanon. Hezbollah has been hit hard, with the most notable blow being the assassination of its Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah and several high-ranking leaders in bombings targeting the group's communication systems. Considering these developments, which pose a direct threat to Iran. Tehran launched missile attacks that were larger in scale than its previous strikes last April. While Israel vowed to retaliate, Tehran confirmed it would not remain silent and promised further responses, creating an atmosphere of heightened anticipation about whether this escalation would lead to containment or a broader regional war. This report analyzes the context and implications of Iran's second missile attack on Israel.

First: Context of the Second Iranian Missile Attack on Israel

Israel launched a series of intense military strikes against Hezbollah, first by targeting its communication networks and, the next day, its wireless communication devices. These strikes resulted in the deaths of at least 37 people and injuries to nearly 3,000. This was followed by the assassination of Hezbollah leader Nasrallah and the deputy commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Brigadier General Abbas Nilforoushan during a meeting in the southern suburbs of Beirut. These developments gave Tel Aviv the momentum to begin a ground invasion of Lebanon and to conduct strikes in Syria and against the Houthis. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

declared that his country would continue operations with the ultimate goal of reaching Tehran and toppling the ruling establishment, stating that "regime change in Iran is looming on the horizon, and it will happen much faster than some think." (8)

These combined developments have caused Tehran to perceive a significant threat on all fronts. Hezbollah, its most crucial regional proxy, has become weakened due to serious security breaches, raising concerns about the potential collapse of the group. Such a scenario would undermine Iran's credibility with other militias it supports in the region, which could lose trust in Tehran's ability to protect them. Domestically, the legitimacy of the Iranian establishment has been called into question, as it has historically relied on a narrative of resistance against global arrogance and confrontation with Israel. Tehran is also anticipating potential Israeli attacks on its nuclear program, military bases, and infrastructure, or even an assassination attempt against the supreme leader himself. These risks may force Iran to withdraw, dismantle its relations with armed groups, and leave them to face their fate alone.

In light of these risks, Iran's leadership appears to have concluded that missile strikes on Israel were necessary to halt its momentum and reassert the deterrence equation. The missile attacks were therefore launched in retaliation for the assassinations of Nasrallah, Ismail Haniyeh, and Nilforoushan.

Second: Implications of the Second Iranian Missile Attack on Israel

The second Iranian missile attack on Israel was markedly different from the previous attack in April in terms of speed, scale, and destructive capability. Information about the attack was leaked only hours before it occurred, while Iran denied the reports initially, unlike the first attack, which was announced 72 hours in advance. The missiles used were more advanced: 80 missiles out of 250 launched reached their targets. whereas in the previous attack, 300 missiles were intercepted without any reaching their destination. While some missiles in the second operation caused damage, they did not display high destructive power. This suggests that Iran demonstrated its ability to hit targets but held back from causing maximum destruction, hinting that future attacks could be far more devastating.

This second operation highlights Iran's calculations regarding Israel's potential response. Iranian officials were quick to assert that any further Israeli retaliation would be met with an even larger and more destructive

response. The Iranian leadership described the attack as a "warning" to Israel not to escalate into a full-scale war, while also signaling that subsequent strikes would be "stronger and more painful." On the Israeli side, military spokesperson Daniel Hagari warned, "There will be consequences for this missile attack. We have plans, and we will act at a time and place of our choosing."

These threats raise several questions about the nature of Israel's potential response — whether it will target strategic sites such as Iran's nuclear facilities and military installations or focus on assassinations of high-ranking officials, as it did with Hezbollah. Similarly, questions remain about how Iran might respond if Israel escalates further.

Conclusion

The new deterrence equation between Iran and Israel depends on the nature of Israel's response and how Iran chooses to retaliate. Regardless of the immediate outcomes, the conflict is on an escalating trajectory, and it is not unlikely that it could evolve into a broader regional war if the current trends between the conflicting parties continue.

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IRAN'S RELATIONS WITH INTERNATIONAL POWERS

On the international front, Iran has signaled an interest in rapprochement with the United States and the West, expressing a desire for openness, understanding, and a return to diplomatic engagement. However, ongoing tensions with Israel and continued Iranian support for Russia in its war against Ukraine have led the United States to view these gestures with skepticism.

We will discuss Iran's relations with the United States and Europe through the following topics:

- US-Iran relations hindered by conflicts on multiple fronts
- European countries intensify sanctions on Iran.

US-Iran Relations Restricted by Multi-Front War

Under pressure from the United States and facing deterrence, Iran has absorbed successive Israeli strikes on some of its leaders and the leaders of its affiliated factions, particularly in Lebanon. Instead of fulfilling its promises to respond to Israel's campaign targeting its sovereignty and regional influence, Iran has opted to engage diplomatically, citing a desire to alleviate the suffering of the people of Gaza. It has expressed openness to the United States and the West, aiming to restore diplomatic channels. However, Pezeshkian, who promotes this approach, does not have full control over certain factions within the establishment that continue to maintain tensions with the United States. This file seeks to highlight the key developments in September 2024 and analyze their impact on US-Iran relations.

First: Pezeshkian Calls for Resuming Nuclear Negotiations

In his first appearance at the United Nations General Assembly, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian expressed Iran's willingness to resume nuclear negotiations and its readiness to consult with relevant parties. This marked one of Pezeshkian's initial steps in implementing his electoral program and following the supreme leader's directives to engage with what he referred to as "the enemy." However, it appears that Iran is not looking to complete the previous

round of negotiations, which ended more than two years ago. Instead, it seeks to negotiate a new agreement. This sentiment was echoed by Iran's foreign minister, who noted that he does not expect a revival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in its original form.

Washington and its Western allies may agree that the old agreement is no longer viable. Iran's nuclear program has advanced too far for the original deal to suffice, and some of the agreement's sunset clauses have already expired. Additionally, Iran has exceeded the limits set by the 2015 agreement regarding its stockpile of highly enriched uranium, quantities of heavy water, and the use of advanced centrifuges.⁽¹⁾

Second: Contradictory Moves Opposing Pezeshkian's Diplomatic Approach

Despite the Pezeshkian government's efforts to promote diplomacy, calm tensions regarding the nuclear deal, and improve relations with the West and the United States to lift sanctions. Iran's overall actions have created further strain between the two countries. Pezeshkian's rhetoric is often contradictory. While he calls for resuming negotiations with the United States, he simultaneously reaffirms Iran's strong ties with Moscow and provides military assistance that has influenced the war in Ukraine. The United States has accused Iran of exporting ballistic missiles to Russia.

Moreover. Pezeshkian does not have full control over Iran's regional policies, particularly its support for the so-called Axis of Resistance. a strategy championed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the "hardliners." This policy, which involves confrontation with US interests and targeting Israel, (a key US ally, is a significant factor in the ongoing deterioration of relations with the United States. Iran's success in launching a satellite in September 2024, using a domestically produced missile, has also raised concerns in Washington, which believes this satellite launch is a cover for advancing Tehran's ballistic missile program. This program is seen as enhancing Iran's deterrence capabilities, limiting US options for countering Tehran in the long run.

In a related context, Iran has been accused of trying to influence the outcome of the US elections. Washington claims that Iranian hackers sent emails containing stolen material from former Republican President Donald Trump's campaign to the Biden campaign and later the Harris campaign, in an attempt to sway the course of the elections.

Third: US Deterrence and Pressure on Iran

While Pezeshkian announces his readiness to resume nuclear negotiations, Washington remains sceptical due to the US administration's concerns about Tehran's policy of nuclear ambiguity. It is worth noting that the US Office of the Director of National In-

telligence has warned that Iran has conducted advanced nuclear research, putting it in a better position to produce a nuclear weapon if it chooses to do so. The assessment also highlighted an increase in statements by Iranian officials about the potential development of nuclear weapons, indicating a shift beyond Iran's previous commitment to peaceful nuclear use. This has likely prompted Washington to intensify its pressure and sanctions on Iran.

On the regional level, the United States has succeeded in imposing a new deterrence equation on Tehran. Despite Tehran's promises to retaliate against the targeting of Hamas Political Bureau Chief Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, Hezbollah leader Fouad Shukr, and other resistance leaders in Lebanon, it delayed any response due to US pressure and signals backed by unprecedented military maneuvers. Iran appeared to fear that retaliation could escalate into a direct confrontation with Washington.

At the same time, the Biden administration has continued applying pressure on Iran. In response to accusations that Iran transferred ballistic missiles to Russia, challenging Washington's strategy in Ukraine, the United States worked through the G7 to build an international consensus on Iran's actions. The group condemned Iran's export of ballistic missiles to Russia, and the United States coordinated with its European partners to impose new sanctions on ships and companies allegedly involved in supplying Iranian weapons to Moscow, in

addition to other sanctions outlined in the table below. (2)

Conclusion

These developments suggest that US-Iran relations are entering a dangerous phase amid the multi-front re-

gional war and escalating tensions. A direct confrontation between the two sides could potentially extend across the region. This escalation makes the prospect of nuclear negotiations unlikely in the foreseeable future, especially given Iran's tendency to use its

Key US Sanctions and Pressures on Iran and Its Affiliated Groups During August-September 2024

Date	Procedure	
Aug. 6 th	The US Department of Justice announced charges against Asif Merchant, a 46-year-old Pakistani national with ties to Iran, for plotting to assassinate US politicians or officials. He tried to hire hitmen in 2024, but the killers were actually undercover FBI agents.	
Aug. 8 th	The United States announced charges against two Iranian nationals, brothers Shahab Mirkazi and Younes Mirkazi, and one Pakistani national, Mohammad Pahlavan, for smuggling Iranian weapons. The brothers allegedly worked for the IRGC.	
Sep. 10 th	A new Russian-Iranian list of individuals and companies has been added to the sanctions list, due to military cooperation and arms transfers from Iran to Russia, which could affect the course of the war in Ukraine.	
Sep. 11 th	The Treasury Department targeted a Hezbollah oil smuggling network comprising three individuals, five companies and two vessels that smuggled oil to generate funding for Hezbollah, as part of its efforts to disrupt the terrorist group's illicit revenue generation operations and isolate its financial network.	
Sep. 18 th	The United States imposed sanctions on 12 Iranians/entities linked to repression in Iran and abroad. They included IRGC members, the Prisons Organization, and the Ministry of Intelligence and Security. The announcement came two days after the anniversary of Mahsa Amini's death.	
Sep. 25 th	Sanctions on more than a dozen entities and vessels for their involvement in shipping Iranian crude oil and liquefied petroleum gas to Syria and East Asia on behalf of the IRGC and Hezbollah.	
Sep. 27 th	Sanctions on Iran-backed cyber actors that attempted to influence the US elections	
Source: Prepared by Regional and International Studies Unit		

nuclear program as a bargaining chip. Additionally, any return to diplomacy, at a time when Iran's allies are facing significant setbacks, could have a serious impact on Tehran's image and its extended regional relationships within what it calls the Axis of Resistance.

European Countries Impose More Sanctions on Iran

Relations between Iran and Europe remain tense, as Iranian airlines have been banned from most European airspace, new sanctions have been imposed on Iran's missile program, and sentences have been announced for those accused of involvement in an Iranian terrorist plot in France. In the September file on Iran-Europe relations, we address three main issues: the sanctions imposed by the European Troika on Iran's weapons transfers to Russia, the involvement of Iranians in assassination attempts against Jews in France and Germany, and Iran's participation in International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) meetings in Vienna.

First: The European Troika Imposes New Sanctions on the Transfer of Iranian Weapons

The UK, France and Germany have jointly announced new punitive measures against Iran and Russia due to Tehran's transfer of ballistic missiles to Russia. (3) These countries have confirmed their intent to designate key entities and individuals involved in Iran's ballistic missile program and

the transfer of these missiles, as well as other weapons, to Russia. The European trio has also cancelled bilateral air service agreements with Iran and denied Iranian aviation access to British, German and Frenchairspace. [4]

Additionally, the EU trio, along with the United States, imposed asset freezes and travel bans on several prominent Iranian military officials. including Brigadier General Seyyed Hamzeh Ghalandari, Brigadier General Ali Jafarabadi, Majid Mousavi and Amir Ali Hajizadeh, all of whom are connected to Iran's ballistic missile development. The assets of the Anzali Free Trade and Industrial Zone Organization and the Baharestan Kish Company were also frozen. The trio's actions are in response to Iran's continued missile tests, including the recent launch of the Oaem-100 missile, which deployed the Chamran-1 satellite 550 kilometers into space. (5) These missile tests are seen as steps toward developing intercontinental ballistic missile capabilities.

Second: French Court Charges Iranians With Involvement in Plot to Kill Jews

A Paris court has charged a couple, Abdulkarim and his partner Sabrina, with involvement in Iranian plots to kill Jews in Germany and France. They were arrested on May 4 on suspicion of conspiring with a criminal terrorist organization. Abdulkarim, who had previously been sentenced to 10 years in prison for a murder in Marseille, was released on suspended

sentence in July 2023. The targets of their alleged plots included an Israeli security company in Paris and Israeli citizens in Munich and Berlin. French security agencies have stated that Iranian secret services resumed their policy of targeted killings in 2015, and the threat has increased in the context of the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas. (6)

Third: Iran Participates in IAEA Meetings in Vienna

The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Mohammad Eslami attended the 68th annual session of the General Conference of the IAEA on September 16, 2024. In his speech, Eslami pledged that Iran is "determined to increase the share of nuclear energy in its energy portfolio to 20,000 megawatts by 2040."(7) He also expressed regret that the number of inspectors assigned to Iran by the agency "is not comparable to any other member state." Eslami claimed that Iran underwent more than five nuclear inspections in 2023, despite its nuclear facilities accounting for only 3% of the total number of nuclear sites worldwide. He described the pressure

on Iran as "unacceptable" and warned that it could set an unjustified precedent, adding, "The JCPOA should not be implemented at the expense of only one participant."

Eslami invited the director general of the IAEA to visit Iran and also met with his Russian counterpart. (8)

For his part, IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi posted, "We agreed with the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, Mohammad Eslami, on the importance of maintaining interaction with each other." Grossi plans to travel to Tehran for important political and technical meetings, which will coincide with the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran.

Conclusion

The chances of improvement in relations between Iran and Europe are increasingly slim, particularly in light of Iranian involvement in planning assassinations in various European countries. Meanwhile, Iran is pushing the IAEA to reduce its oversight, particularly regarding the frequent inspections of its nuclear facilities.

Endnotes

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