

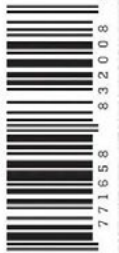
MONTHLY REPORT

# Iran Case File

April 2025

*Your window on Iran from inside and abroad*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2025, Iran experienced a wave of significant developments across political, economic, social and ideological fronts. On the foreign policy level, Tehran's interactions with Arab, regional and international actors grew increasingly complex — dynamics that are likely to influence the country's diplomatic positioning in the coming period.

**Domestically**, the political scene was marked by heightened tensions between the “hardliner”-dominated Parliament and Pezeshkian's administration. “Hardliners” continued efforts to undermine the “reformist” government, building on their earlier success in ousting the minister of economy in March. In April, lawmakers submitted two new requests to summon Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi and Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadegh for questioning. The push to interrogate Sadeq gained momentum after a powerful explosion struck Shahid Rajaei port on April 26. Lawmakers blamed the incident on her alleged mismanagement, citing her appointment of unqualified personnel to oversee the strategic facility.

This month's economic analysis relates to the strategic significance of Shahid Rajaei port, highlighting its central role in Iran's domestic and international trade, as well as its importance for regional transit routes. While the explosion at the port caused immediate material and financial damages estimated in the billions, along with a temporary suspension of trade activity and a drop in the national currency's value, the deeper concern lies in the broader implications of the incident. The publicly stated causes point to structural flaws in Iran's port and customs system — namely the influence of powerful actors over port operations, lack of regulatory oversight, and entrenched corruption. These systemic issues threaten to inflict long-term economic harm by weakening Iran's foreign trade performance, dimin-

ishing the competitiveness of its logistical infrastructure compared to neighboring countries, and eroding international trust in its trade gateways.

On the social front, Iran continues to grapple with the widespread issue of drug abuse, a scourge that has gained momentum across the country. However, its growing prevalence among the youth — particularly teenagers and school students — has raised alarm, adding to a host of existing social challenges that demand immediate action from the Iranian authorities. Synthetic drugs, in particular, are increasingly common among adolescents due to their affordability and easy availability compared to natural narcotics. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, lack of development opportunities, and family instability, including high divorce rates, have all contributed to the worsening of this crisis.

On the ideological level, the International Union of Muslim Scholars — widely regarded as the religious arm of the Muslim Brotherhood — issued a fatwa in April 2025 calling for a mass mobilization of Muslims worldwide and declaring jihad in Gaza. Despite its sweeping language, the fatwa was criticized for its lack of scholarly rigor, limited understanding of the legal framework of jihad in contemporary Islamic thought, and failure to account for the evolving geopolitical dynamics and power balances in the region. Public response to the fatwa was notably muted; it failed to capture the attention of the broader Muslim public and was largely disregarded. The episode further highlighted the declining influence of Islamist movements in both the Arab and Islamic worlds, with many viewing such declarations as politically motivated or self-serving, rather than grounded in le-

gitimate religious authority or aligned with national and communal interests.

**Iran's foreign relations with Arab and regional actors** witnessed notable developments. On the Arab front, particularly in the context of engagement between Iran and the Gulf states, the visit of Saudi Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman to Tehran marked a significant step forward in the gradual normalization process that began with the signing of the Beijing Agreement in March 2023. The visit stood out not only for its timing — amid major international and regional shifts — but also for its content and high-level meetings, including the delivery of a letter from King Salman to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. These elements underscored Riyadh's strategic commitment to dialogue and cooperation as a means of addressing regional challenges.

While Iran appears to share this outlook, as expressed through official statements and diplomatic gestures, mixed signals in certain Iranian media outlets that continue to criticize or undermine Saudi Arabia suggest an internal lack of coherence or hesitation in fully embracing this strategic direction. The contradiction between official policy and some public discourse raises questions about Iran's clarity and consistency in its approach to regional reconciliation.

At the regional level, Israel has been closely following the progress of the US-Iran nuclear talks, which resumed in April 2025. The very announcement of the negotiations ran counter to Israeli expectations, particularly given Tel Aviv's anticipation of unwavering support from the Trump administration — support that had manifested in strong backing for the Netanyahu government during the Gaza war, even to the extent of President Don-

ald Trump proposing the displacement of Palestinians from the Gaza Strip.

In a show of its determination to confront Iran's nuclear ambitions, Israel issued threats of a unilateral military strike against Iranian nuclear facilities, signaling its willingness to act without US backing if necessary. This posture reflects Israel's continued concern over any diplomatic engagement with Tehran that might legitimize or preserve aspects of its nuclear program.

At the level of Iran-Türkiye relations, bilateral ties continue to exhibit a complex dynamic that combines cooperation in certain areas with competition in others. While this rivalry occasionally leads to friction, overlapping strategic and economic interests have thus far prevented either side from pushing tensions to open confrontation.

Syria remained one of the most prominent arenas for this indirect competition during the month, as new regional and international developments indicated a growing trend toward redefining spheres of influence. Iran, which has seen its role in Syria gradually diminish post-Assad, views these shifts with increasing unease. Tehran fears that its exclusion from the evolving arrangements could cost it its longstanding status as a key actor in

the Syrian conflict. Such a vacuum potentially benefits both Türkiye and Israel, giving them greater room to reshape Syria's internal balance of power while excluding Tehran.

**In the realm of Iran's interactions with major international powers**, the month marked the revival of nuclear negotiations between Tehran and Washington, with three rounds held in Oman and Italy. A planned fourth round, originally set for May 3, was postponed due to logistical issues, according to Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi.

Meanwhile, in a bid to reduce tensions and resolve outstanding points of contention, IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi visited Tehran on April 15 and April 16, holding meetings with top Iranian officials. His visit aimed to narrow the gap between Iran and the agency, particularly on verification and transparency issues.

On a parallel track, representatives from the European trio were expected to meet with Iranian officials ahead of the now-delayed fourth round. However, the meeting has not materialized. These European countries continue to warn of the potential reactivation of the snapback mechanism, which would reinstate UN sanctions on Iran should the nuclear talks collapse without reaching a deal.

# **DEVELOPMENTS IN IRAN'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS**

In April 2025, key developments in Iran revolved around four major concerns: heightened calls for increased oversight of Pezeshkian's administration, ongoing discussions about the economic impact and vulnerabilities of Shahid Rajaei port, a troubling rise in drug abuse among younger demographics, and the political implications of a newly issued fatwa regarding Gaza.

### **Calls for Further Ministerial Scrutiny of Pezeshkian's Government**

Since the electoral victory of “reformist” President Masoud Pezeshkian against his “hardliner” rival Saeed Jalili in June 2024, there has been increasing expectation that they might turn the Iranian Parliament into a platform for challenging the government. Thus far, they have managed to remove Economy Minister Abdolnasser Hemmati through a no-confidence vote and issued a formal warning to Labor Minister Mohammad Maigari. Additionally, they are preparing to question three more ministers, most recently targeting Minister of Roads and Urban Development Farzaneh Sadegh.

Although lawmakers had already raised numerous concerns about her performance, the explosion at Shahid Rajaei Port on April 26, 2025, was seized upon as a catalyst to escalate criticism. This file focuses on two main themes: the accusations leveled by “hardliners” and their efforts to summon the minister of roads and urban development to Parliament and the broader political reactions to this campaign.

### **Allegations Target the Minister of Roads Amid Calls for her Questioning and Dismissal**

Although Pezeshkian's government has yet to complete its first year in office, it has already faced an unprecedented wave of impeachment efforts from the Iranian Parliament. So far, lawmakers have questioned two ministers: Maighari, who received a formal warning, and Economy Minister Abdolnasser Hemmati, who was dismissed in March 2025. Last December, a group of lawmakers also called for the questioning of Minister of Petroleum Mohsen Paknejad. By April 2025, motions had been prepared to summon both Energy Minister Abbas Aliabadi and Roads and Urban Development Minister Sadegh.

The pace and level of these moves mark a record for any government in its first year, signaling a mounting campaign by “hardliners” to pressure the administration. This escalation suggests the potential for growing tensions between the Parliament and the executive branch in the months ahead. It may also foreshadow the unraveling of Pezeshkian's so-called “national consensus government,” which was formed with representation from across the political spectrum within the Iranian republic. Over recent months, it has become increasingly evident that “hardliners” are more focused on undermining the administration than maintaining political unity — a stance “reformists” describe as an effort to “settle political scores” after their rivals' defeat in the presidential race and their diminished influence over cabinet appointments.

The impeachment of Sadegh has ignited considerable controversy in Iran, particularly given her status as the only woman in Pezeshkian's cabinet, the youngest minister in the government, and a representative of a younger political generation. Lawmakers backing the impeachment motion have presented a broad range of accusations, including negligence in regulating port operations, the shutdown of the housing registration system (allegedly denying citizens their legal rights), failure to enforce housing market laws, disorder in the transportation sector, instability in ministry leadership through frequent dismissals and appointments, repeated legal violations, insufficient technical knowledge and a general lack of awareness regarding key developments within the ministry.<sup>(1)</sup>

Additional pressure has come from those calling for a full investigation into the April 2025 explosion at Shahid Rajaei

port and demanding Sadegh's removal. These critics argue that her appointment of unqualified officials to manage the port led to a major humanitarian disaster that harmed thousands.<sup>(2)</sup> However, preliminary findings suggest the presence of military operatives at the port, who had improperly stored dual-use materials — such as solid missile fuel — in civilian areas. Despite this, some members of Parliament continue to blame Sadegh and the broader government, turning the incident into a political flashpoint amid broader tensions between the administration and hardline lawmakers.

### **Reactions to “Hardliner” Efforts to Question the Minister**

Opponents of the impeachment move argue that questioning the minister at this particular juncture strips the process of its procedural merit and exposes the political motives behind it. This is based on several key considerations, foremost among them the brevity of the minister's tenure, which is insufficient for a fair assessment of her performance. Additionally, parliamentary protocol was bypassed, as relevant committees and lawmakers failed to first summon the minister for dialogue or request clarifications before escalating the matter to a formal questioning session in Parliament.

Others argued that the vague and overly broad language in the draft interpellation of Sadegh lacked solid grounding. While some points related to the housing sector were outlined with some specificity, the criticisms of the transportation sector were couched in ambiguous terms. Phrases such as “negligence in the Ports Organization” and “bureaucratic red tape and a critical situation in the transportation sector” were cited in the draft, yet what lawmakers meant by “red tape” or “critical situation” remains

undefined. Such unclear phrasing, critics argue, cannot serve as definitive grounds for impeaching a minister whose ministry is still operating under the immense pressure of Iran's challenges. From this perspective, opponents of the interpellation believe that removing Sadegh at this stage would inflict more damage than allowing her to continue managing this vital ministry.<sup>(3)</sup>

Within Parliament, many lawmakers contend that Sadegh's strengths outweigh her weaknesses. They point to the fact that work has continued uninterrupted during her tenure, with some projects even advancing swiftly. As a result, these lawmakers argue that she deserves more time for a thorough evaluation before any judgment is made about her performance.

The evidence presented by those opposed to questioning Sadegh mirrors the arguments made prior to the questioning of Hemmati. It was claimed then that the questioning was more politically motivated than grounded in concrete evidence. However, parliamentarians ultimately voted to oust Hemmati, a scenario that has sparked concern among both the government and lawmakers defending Sadegh's performance. In response, her supporters have launched a strong campaign, warning of the potential negative consequences of questioning the minister. They argue that her removal at such a critical juncture could delay or halt infrastructure projects, create administrative instability, and diminish investor confidence. Some have advised parliamentarians to refrain from hasty actions, advocating for cooperation, effective oversight, and constructive engagement with the government. They argue that only through rationality and administrative stability can Iran overcome its

challenges and pave the way for sustainable development.<sup>(4)</sup> Additionally, some lawmakers have suggested delaying any questioning session and granting Sadegh an additional five to six months to prove her performance, work collaboratively with the government, and regain the confidence to continue her work more effectively.<sup>(5)</sup>

### Conclusion

The Ministry of Roads and Urban Development is one of the most significant ministries in Iran, overseeing numerous crucial economic and development sectors, including land, sea, and air transportation both domestically and internationally, as well as setting policies related to housing and urban development. As such, it is unlikely that hardline lawmakers will heed calls to suspend attempts to question the minister regarding her role in the Shahid Rajaei port explosion or other accusations against her, unless there is intervention from the supreme leader or a clear acknowledgment from the regime of responsibility by other institutions or the involvement of external parties in the incident. Even if such factors prevent the questioning of the minister at this stage, it does not necessarily mean that “hardliners” will refrain from questioning other ministers in the future.

### Shahid Rajaei Port: Economic Significance and Points of Weakness

On April 26, 2025, a massive explosion struck Shahid Rajaei port — one of Iran’s most vital commercial hubs — located in the southern city of Bandar Abbas on the Arabian Gulf. The blast resulted in the loss of lives, vehicles, cargo and temporarily paralyzed trade activity at the port, which only resumed gradually in the days that followed. This file first examines the strategic importance of Shahid Rajaei port to the Iranian economy. The second part analyzes the explosion’s di-

rect and indirect economic repercussions and sheds light on the broader structural weaknesses within Iran’s trade and customs system.

### Economic Significance of Shahid Rajaei Port

Shahid Rajaei port plays a pivotal role in Iran’s foreign trade and overall economic dynamism, particularly in terms of growth and employment generation. Alongside Imam Khomeini port, it serves as one of the country’s primary gateways for international commerce and is strategically integrated into regional trade corridors. Since the 1980s, Shahid Rajaei port has been Iran’s main hub for trade and container handling. With over 40 berths accommodating ocean-going vessels and the ability to receive high-tonnage ships, it enjoys a distinct comparative advantage over other southern Iranian ports. On a global scale, it ranks 44th among 3,500 major ports, boasting an annual throughput capacity of 100 million tons,<sup>(6)</sup> underscoring its critical economic importance.

The port thus serves as the cornerstone of Iran’s maritime trade, managing 85% to 90% of the country’s container traffic, 55% of total import and export trade and 70% of transit trade through Iran. It is crucial not only for oil exports but also for non-oil trade and vital imports essential to sustaining the Iranian economy.

Shahid Rajaei port facilitates the entry of industrial raw materials and strategic food supplies such as wheat, rice, oil and sugar — commodities that form a significant share of Iran’s imports. Data indicate that Iran annually imports around 20 million to 25 million tons of basic commodities, of which about 2 million tons arrive via this port alone.<sup>(7)</sup> Moreover, the port supports key industrial sectors such as steel, metals, and petrochemicals, and houses a special economic zone that of-

fers favorable tax and customs conditions to enhance exports and re-exports. Its role becomes even more critical during periods of sanctions and currency shortages, helping generate foreign exchange and drive trade, employment, and overall economic growth.

Additionally, the strategic location of Shahid Rajaei port plays a pivotal role in advancing Iran's ambitions to solidify its foothold in regional and global trade corridors. Situated along the Strait of Hormuz, the port links directly to open international waters via the Arabian Gulf. Its proximity to the free trade zones on Kish and Qeshm islands and to key regional ports like the UAE's Jebel Ali enhances its logistical importance. As part of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, the port serves not only Iran but also landlocked countries such as Afghanistan, making it a vital maritime gateway. Shahid Rajaei port is connected to numerous global shipping lines and is integrated with Iran's internal logistics network through extensive road and rail infrastructure, which support national supply chains and link the port to Iran's borders with neighboring countries. It plays a crucial role in facilitating transit trade, particularly in the movement of goods from southern origins such as India and Southeast Asia to northern destinations including Central Asia, the Caucasus, Russia and Europe. As such, it underpins 70% of Iran's transit trade, reinforcing its centrality in regional commerce.

### **Economic Implications and Institutional Weaknesses**

The explosion at Shahid Rajaei port resulted in around 70 casualties and inflicted extensive damage on port infrastructure, including equipment, cargo containers, vehicles and goods awaiting clearance in customs zones. Preliminary

assessments put the direct financial losses at \$3 billion to \$5 billion,<sup>(8)</sup> while daily shutdowns were estimated to cost the Iranian economy approximately \$25 million.<sup>(9)</sup> Although the port was likely closed for several days before gradually reopening, the disruption had immediate implications. In the short term, it interrupted supply chains and constrained the availability of raw materials and certain goods on the domestic market — factors that could trigger temporary price hikes. This occurred amid already high inflation hovering around 35% annually. Additionally, the port's closure disrupted exports and transit trade, which form a significant part of Iran's foreign trade activities. The impact was swiftly reflected in currency markets, where the exchange rate jumped from roughly 80,000 toman to over 86,000 toman per US dollar in the aftermath of the explosion. Consequently, authorities moved to resume port operations as quickly as possible. These short-term economic disruptions, while significant, are viewed as temporary setbacks that are expected to ease as port activity normalizes.

The explosion's indirect economic repercussions, which may have long-term effects and could be more significant than the temporary direct losses, are particularly concerning. The most serious among them is the weakening of Iranian ports' logistical competitiveness in favor of neighboring ports. This is especially relevant if we consider the reported cause of the explosion, according to the Iranian narrative, which attributes it to the unsafe storage of military-use products — such as solid fuel used in missile production — within the commercial port.

The explosion highlights fundamental weaknesses within the Iranian customs and port system. Among the most critical vulnerabilities are the failure to adhere to proper safety procedures in ports and the

disregard for expert warnings on the storage of flammable materials. This leads to a deeper issue — the flawed and opaque structure of Iranian customs, as well as the strong influence of regime-affiliated organizations such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Mostazafan (Oppressed) Foundation. These entities can bypass inspections and bring in shipments unchecked due to their powerful presence in the country. Some Iranian analysts attribute the explosion directly to this influence. Additionally, corruption and bribery among customs officials have long been an issue, with numerous scandals coming to light over the years. Notably, at the same port, an illegal import scheme involving more than 6,400 luxury cars was uncovered in 2017. Moreover, Ahmad Tavakoli, a member of the Expediency Discernment Council, had previously warned the minister of economy in the 12th government about the dangers of ignoring reports of corruption in customs.<sup>(10)</sup>

Another key issue lies in broader structural weaknesses within Iran's customs and ports system, which undermine its logistical competitiveness when compared to rival regional ports such as the UAE's Jebel Ali, Oman's Sohar and Pakistan's Gwadar and Karachi ports. These weaknesses include inefficient administrative and institutional frameworks, with customs procedures at Iranian ports — such as Shahid Rajaei — taking over 70 days to complete, whereas similar procedures at Dubai's port take roughly a week.<sup>(11)</sup> Additionally, Iranian ports are vulnerable to cyberattacks, such as the 2020 incident that temporarily crippled operations at Shahid Rajaei Port.

Further compounding the challenge are US sanctions imposed on Iran's maritime trade following Washington's

withdrawal from the nuclear deal. These sanctions have restricted Iran's access to foreign currency and complicated international financial transfers, both of which significantly hamper the efficiency and resilience of Iran's port logistics and trade infrastructure.

### Conclusion

Shahid Rajaei port holds a prominent status among Iran's ports and plays a central role in the country's domestic commerce, foreign trade, and foreign currency inflows. As a key hub for regional and transit trade, its importance to Iran's economic infrastructure cannot be overstated. Although the April explosion caused immediate material and financial losses — estimated in the billions — and led to a temporary suspension of trade and a depreciation of the national currency, the longer-term implications may prove even more severe. The underlying causes of the explosion and their broader economic fallout highlight structural vulnerabilities in Iran's port and customs systems. These issues risk further weakening the competitive position of Iranian ports in comparison to those of neighboring countries, particularly in the UAE and Pakistan.

### Drug Abuse Rates Increase Among Younger Age Groups in Iran

Several Iranian newspapers have raised alarms over the alarming spread of drug abuse in society, particularly among the youth and in schools. This growing issue presents a serious social challenge, exacerbating an already complex array of domestic concerns, and it calls for urgent intervention by the government. This file explores the scale of the drug problem, the root causes contributing to its spread, its consequences, the government's response to the crisis, and the strategies employed to combat this detrimental phenomenon, which has far-reaching ef-

fects both domestically and internationally.

### **Increasing Drug Addiction Across Iran's Social Segments**

Iranian society faces a significant challenge with high rates of drug use and trafficking, particularly among adolescents. The age at which individuals first experiment with drugs has lowered, with the average onset of addiction now around 24 years old, signaling a troubling trend for the future of the country. Official statistics report that over 4.4 million Iranians are regular or intermittent drug users. Considering family members, an estimated 15 million people are directly or indirectly affected by drug use, making up about one-sixth of the population. There are roughly 70,000 individuals openly battling addiction, with addiction rates reaching 22% among workers and 2% among students.<sup>(12)</sup> Additionally, data from the Secretariat of the National Tobacco Control Headquarters within the Ministry of Health shows that 85% of addiction cases started with the use of cigarettes and hookah, typically between the ages of 13 and 15.<sup>(13)</sup> This initial exposure often leads to the progression of addiction and the use of various drugs within the country.

Among school students in Iran, marijuana and opium are the most commonly abused drugs.<sup>(14)</sup> Additionally, a new synthetic drug known as “Iranian lion” or “Iranian opium” has gained popularity. This development is largely due to the high prices of opium imported from Afghanistan, exacerbated by the ban on opium cultivation and the depreciation of the Iranian currency against the dollar. The ease of access and lower cost of synthetic drugs have contributed to their widespread use among students. For example, by the end of 2024, the cost of a kilogram of opium had reached approx-

imately 200 million tomans.<sup>(15)</sup> As a result, opium, heroin, methamphetamine and marijuana are the most frequently abused substances in the country, with opium being the leading choice.<sup>(16)</sup>

### **Reasons and Impacts of Drug Abuse by Younger Age Groups**

There are numerous factors contributing to drug abuse among children and adolescents in Iranian society. From an economic standpoint, widespread poverty, high unemployment rates, a lack of development opportunities and school dropouts are driving forces behind the increasing number of young people turning to drugs as an escape from their difficult realities. Drugs offer a temporary sense of euphoria, and some may even get involved in the drug trade, which promises quick financial rewards.

Social factors also play a significant role, as family issues such as divorce — affecting 30% to 35% of addicts — can leave children vulnerable. Negative experiences, both within and outside the family, add to the complexities of their environment. Psychological factors, including emotional issues, peer influence, curiosity and frustration from personal or academic failures, also contribute to drug use. Additionally, weak religious and moral restraints may leave individuals without the internal guidance to resist temptation.

The accessibility and low cost of drugs make them particularly appealing to adolescents, further compounded by their widespread availability. The ease with which these substances can be found on the internet has also accelerated the spread of drug abuse, making it easier for young people to obtain and use these dangerous substances.

The spread of drug abuse in Iranian society has far-reaching consequences.

On a personal level, addicts often face ostracism from their families and communities, leading to a breakdown in social relationships. This isolation can result in the loss of education and employment opportunities, contributing to a cycle of poverty and criminal behavior. Additionally, drug abuse can cause a range of psychological problems, disorders and behavioral deviations, further exacerbating the individual's situation.

The physical and health-related consequences are also severe, with addicts potentially facing organ damage, physical injuries and a higher risk of contracting infectious and communicable diseases. In some cases, drug abuse may lead to involvement in extreme activities, such as organ trafficking or sexual assault. These outcomes not only harm individuals but also have a broader social impact.

From a national perspective, drug abuse poses significant security and economic challenges. The financial burden on the state is estimated to be around 200 trillion tomans annually, factoring in the costs of treatment, law enforcement, detention, and the social repercussions of widespread addiction. The loss of life is also a tragic outcome, with an average of 2,000 deaths per year attributed to drug abuse.<sup>(17)</sup>

### **The Iranian Government's Flawed Response**

The Iranian government's approach to addressing drug abuse, particularly among young people, involves a combination of security, social and cultural mechanisms. However, significant imbalances persist, hindering the effectiveness of these efforts. According to a report from the Parliament Research Center, one of the main challenges is the operation of compulsory treatment centers. These centers tend to focus primarily on removing addicts

from urban areas, neglecting long-term treatment strategies, prevention, and rehabilitation.<sup>(18)</sup> This approach lacks a comprehensive focus on sustainable recovery and the social empowerment of individuals affected by addiction.

Addiction expert Saeed Safatian highlights the glaring deficiency of prevention programs, pointing out that many key institutions, such as the Ministry of Education, fail to provide addiction specialists or organize courses focused on prevention. He also criticized the Radio and Television Corporation for not utilizing its extensive media platform to broadcast educational programs on life skills and parental guidance, which could play a significant role in preventing addiction. Additionally, the Ministry of Health, the Social Welfare Organization, and higher education institutions are noted for their lack of active engagement in addiction prevention efforts, despite being critical bodies in addressing this issue.<sup>(19)</sup>

Safatian further emphasizes the need for long-term, sustainable strategies rather than short-term measures. Effective prevention requires thorough needs assessments, recognition of the specific challenges faced by target groups, and the development of programs tailored to the cultural and societal context of Iran. He advocates for continuous evaluation of these programs to ensure their effectiveness and to meet the evolving challenges posed by addiction in Iranian society.<sup>(20)</sup>

The issue of drug addiction did not receive meaningful attention from the Iranian establishment until it crafted the Sixth Development Plan, which marked a shift toward a more serious engagement with the problem. This plan set a key objective of reducing social harm by 25%. However, the plan ultimately failed to meet this target, primarily due to inad-

equate evaluation mechanisms, the absence of precise and relevant indicators, and a failure to build on previous experiences.<sup>(21)</sup>

An official from the Iranian Anti-Narcotics Committee stated that Iran has adopted a set of balanced strategies to combat drug abuse across four key areas: controlling the supply and entry of drugs, raising public awareness for prevention, providing treatment and harm reduction, and ensuring social support for affected individuals. Particular emphasis was placed on a dedicated document concerning addiction prevention.<sup>(22)</sup>

In addition, the Ministry of Interior has recognized the necessity of bolstering international cooperation to combat drug trafficking. As part of these efforts, Iran signed a joint cooperation agreement with Tajikistan.<sup>(23)</sup> Moreover, a high-level meeting was convened involving the president's representative, the Secretary-General of the Anti-Narcotics Committee, and the minister of justice to implement special programs aimed at preventing and combating drugs and psychotropic substances. The meeting also addressed the need for legislative reforms, particularly amendments to the Anti-Narcotics Law in prioritized cases and for implementing international agreements regarding prisoner exchanges, extradition and judicial cooperation.<sup>(24)</sup>

### Conclusion

The Iranian establishment faces a persistent inability to control the growing scourge of drug abuse within its society — particularly among children and adolescents, who are vital to the nation's future. This failure is primarily due to the government's lack of emphasis on preventive measures, such as addressing the root causes that drive individuals toward addiction and ensuring the proper reha-

bilitation of recovering addicts to prevent relapse.

The problem is compounded by structural weaknesses at the institutional level. A lack of coordination among the various state agencies and organizations responsible for combating drug abuse has hindered the development of a cohesive national strategy. This has also weakened the implementation of even short-term objectives. Unless these systemic issues are addressed, the spread of drug abuse is likely to continue and potentially worsen.

### Political Employment: Significations of the Recent Fatwa Issued on Gaza

The International Union of Muslim Scholars — widely regarded as the affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood — released a statement characterized as a fatwa (a formal legal opinion in Islamic jurisprudence), in which it declared that Muslims throughout the Islamic world are religiously obligated to engage in jihad against Israel. This declaration provoked significant debate within Islamic scholarly and religious circles. Prominent religious institutions responded by repudiating the fatwa, criticizing it as reckless and lacking in a proper understanding of the higher objectives of jihad within Islamic law, especially in light of contemporary contexts and interpretations.

In light of the controversy it stirred, this file seeks to analyze the various dimensions of the fatwa — its timing, political instrumentalization, broader ramifications and the underlying questions it raises.

### Political Employment of the Fatwa

The fatwa issued by the International Union of Muslim Scholars came amid a period of heightened regional and international tension. The union appears to have instrumentalized the fatwa for political purposes, aiming to sow discord

between regional states and their citizens or to incite instability by encouraging individuals to storm border crossings and undertake acts of jihad without government authorization. This political utilization of the fatwa may be interpreted as follows:

### ***Mobilizing the Masses Against Central Governments***

The fatwa called upon Muslim populations worldwide to engage in jihad through direct military action and the provision of military support to the mujāhidīn. It asserted that jihad constitutes “an absolute obligation” (*fard ‘ayn*) — first upon the people of Palestine, followed by the neighboring states of Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, and ultimately upon all Arab and Islamic countries.<sup>(25)</sup> A subsidiary statement issued during the conference of the so-called “Scholars’ Mobilization in Support of Gaza” — a group affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and composed largely of members from the International Union of Muslim Scholars — affirmed that it is a religious duty incumbent upon the rulers of Islamic states to declare a general mobilization, open battlefronts, and deploy their armies “to repel the Zionist aggression.”<sup>(26)</sup>

One prominent member of the union issued a particularly provocative fatwa, declaring that “gathering in front of embassies is a religious obligation,” and that responding to the call for general mobilization is likewise obligatory.<sup>(27)</sup> He went further by launching a vehement attack against Arab governments, inciting the youth of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria to march into Palestine and forcibly breach the border crossings. He specifically stated: “The people of Egypt must head to Rafah to liberate this crossing, which has been taken from Egypt now. Egypt has

no sovereignty over the Rafah crossing. Millions of Egyptian youths must move to Rafah. The youth of Jordan must not remain in public squares, but must stand at the borders.”<sup>(28)</sup>

As for the responsibilities of governments, the union’s fatwa demanded immediate military, economic and political action to stop what it described as “genocide and comprehensive destruction,” in accordance with their official capacities. Such pronouncements appear designed to exert pressure on national governments and to embarrass them in the eyes of public opinion, while disregarding the geopolitical realities, the existing military balance of power and the complex nature of the conflict. In this light, the calls for general mobilization and jihad can be seen as a politicized appropriation of religion and Islamic legal discourse in a domain that requires prudence and strategic calculation.

### ***Counter-fatwas***

Numerous official and non-official religious bodies rejected the fatwa. Among them was the Alexandrian Salafi Call, the religious wing of Egypt’s Nour Party, whose prominent figure Yasser Borhamy\* dismissed the union’s statement, citing the existence of a binding treaty between Egypt and Israel. Borhamy criticized Hamas for launching the October 7 operation unilaterally, without prior coordination with key regional states — apart from Iran. He invoked the Quranic verse: “And if they seek help of you in religion, then you must help, except against a people between whom and you is a treaty” (al-Anfāl: 72), arguing that any attempt to enter the war in support of Gaza required consultation with Muslim nations capable of offering support. “They only informed Iran,” Borhamy asserted,

(\*) The head of the Salafi Call in Alexandria and its founder.

“so we must first declare to Israel that the treaty is annulled.”<sup>(29)</sup>

Likewise, Sheikh Mustafa al-Adawi\* opposed the notion of youth mobilizing independently to fight in Palestine, stressing that jihad is subject to specific legal conditions and jurisprudential regulations within Islamic law.<sup>(30)</sup> Egypt’s Dar al-Iftaa also categorically rejected the union’s fatwa, contending that it posed a direct threat to Egyptian national security.

Dar al-Iftaa offered several justifications for its rejection. First, it emphasized that the authority to declare jihad and initiate warfare lies solely with legitimate leadership operating under a recognized political and legal framework. In the contemporary context, this authority is vested in the sovereign state and its political leadership — not in transnational or partisan entities that lack legal or representative legitimacy. Second, the institution condemned any incitement of individuals to defy state authority or diverge from official policy, framing such actions as incitement to disorder, civil unrest and corruption. Third, Dar al-Iftaa argued that issuing calls for jihad without due regard for a nation’s actual political, military, and economic capacities reflects a dangerous irresponsibility. Such calls contradict core Islamic principles that emphasize prudent deliberation, strategic foresight, and a balance between potential benefit and harm. Islamic jurisprudence mandates that decisions — particularly those with far-reaching implications — be grounded in a careful assessment of consequences and the public interest, lest

impulsive actions result in greater harm to the Muslim community.<sup>(31)</sup>

### ***The Jurisprudential Approximation***

From a strictly scholarly standpoint — whether viewed through the lens of Islamic jurisprudence or the higher objectives of the Shari’a — the fatwa failed to engage with the deeper philosophical and purposive dimensions of jihad in the context of the modern era. It overlooked crucial considerations that must now inform any such ruling, including the perspectives of authoritative national institutions such as the military, security and intelligence agencies. In today’s world, decisions concerning armed conflict are governed by a complex matrix of factors — political, economic, social, logistical and interest-based — each requiring expert evaluation.

The nature of warfare has fundamentally changed; it no longer resembles the earlier historical paradigm of combat waged with swords and spears. Similarly, the epistemic centrality once held by religious scholars and jurists in times preceding the rise of the modern nation-state has significantly diminished. In contemporary state systems, the authority to decide on matters of war resides exclusively with the state itself, particularly with its military and security establishments. These institutions possess privileged access to classified intelligence, early warning mechanisms, threat-assessment tools and strategic analysis. Moreover, they operate within the framework of international and regional alliances and geopolitical obligations.

(\*) An Egyptian scholar of Salafi academia.

### **Significations and Potential Outcomes**

The Muslim Brotherhood and its religious wings appear to be facing a worsening dilemma in the Arab region. Accordingly, they are attempting to exploit the events unfolding in Gaza to generate legitimacy and popular support within Arab states, as well as to sow disorder in these countries or pressure them into accepting the group's presence as an established reality. Therefore, the statements and fatwas issued by the International Union of Muslim Scholars may be interpreted and their implications assessed as follows:

#### ***Seeking to Restore Legitimacy***

The Muslim Brotherhood and its international affiliates are seeking a symbolic or illusory form of legitimacy within Arab countries, following a series of setbacks and losses across the region — such as its defeat in Algeria's presidential elections and Morocco's parliamentary elections, its complete political marginalization in Egypt, Sudan and Tunisia, its confrontation with authorities in Jordan and its popular overthrow in both Syria and Sudan. The group also aims to challenge official religious institutions and undermine their legitimacy and popular credibility, attempting to replace them with the authority of the group's own religious leadership or affiliated clerics, fostering a climate of imbalance and distortion.

In this context, the group is seeking to exploit the developments in Gaza to manufacture an alternative source of political and religious legitimacy — one that stands in opposition to the existing legitimacy of ruling regimes and the authority of established, traditional religious institutions in the Arab world.

#### ***Exerting Pressure on States***

The group seeks to exploit public outrage over the developments in Gaza as a means of pressuring the state, aiming to regain

influence after the significant setbacks it has endured. It operates on the assumption that such fatwas will either compel Arab states to enter into negotiations with the group regarding the terms of its presence and scope of activity, or will destabilize states through mass mobilization, incitement against ruling regimes, the storming of border crossings and the launching of uncontrolled jihad. This, in turn, could lead to widespread disorder, potentially toppling some governments or eroding their legitimacy.

At the same time, the public's apparent indifference to the group's rhetoric and the fatwas issued by its affiliated religious entities may be seen as an indication of widespread social rejection of the group's discourse — or as evidence that the public has moved beyond this approach and is now focused on other priorities.

#### ***Potential Outcomes of the Group's Statements and Fatwas***

The fatwas issued by the group seem to be largely limited to the media. On the ground, there has been no mass mobilization, with people not surrounding American or Israeli embassies, nor staging sit-ins in front of them — this includes Türkiye, the country from which the union's statement was issued. This indicates that the group's calls and fatwas have not only lost their momentum and effectiveness, but also the trust of the public. Rather than conducting a genuine review to understand why people are distancing themselves from its rhetoric, the group consistently blames Arab governments and regimes. This serves as a way to avoid self-reflection and preserve the organization's hierarchical structure, safeguarding its political and financial interests and maintaining its network of relations with regional countries that support it.

## Conclusion

The Muslim Brotherhood and its religious wings are facing a significant crisis following losses in several Arab countries, most recently the ban imposed by the Jordanian government after violent plots by a network affiliated with the group were uncovered. As a result, the group, through its religious branches, is attempting to exploit the events in Gaza to regain legitimacy and restore its influence. It also seeks to delegitimize Arab regimes and the nation-state, promoting its international project of “global mastery.” This strategy resembles Iran’s approach. While it does not directly serve Tehran, it aligns with Iran’s strategic and sectarian interests in the region by creating chaos and inciting the masses against Arab regimes

and governments. However, when viewed comprehensively, the group’s demands and statements — whether issued by the group itself or its religious wings — have been met with almost complete indifference. Technically, the fatwa is evidence of a lack of understanding of the complex strategic reality and conflict dynamics in the region. It also represents the blatant politicization of Islamic jurisprudence to serve the agendas and ideologies of sub-state groups and actors, something that Arab and Muslim citizens have recognized with considerable awareness. The fatwa faced significant opposition, with counter-fatwas and statements from both official institutions and unofficial scholarly entities across all Muslim sects, thus diminishing its ability to influence and restricting it to a limited scope.

## **IRAN-ARAB INTERACTIONS**

Iran's interactions with Arab countries, especially its Gulf neighbors, have witnessed a notable shift following the détente agreement it signed with Saudi Arabia. The latter has dispatched its defense minister to Tehran, accompanied by a delegation and a letter from King Salman.

## Saudi Defense Minister's Visit to Tehran Signals Shift in Bilateral Ties

Gulf-Iran relations have remained relatively stable since the Chinese-brokered rapprochement between Riyadh and Tehran in March 2023, despite ongoing regional and global turbulence. This period of calm appears to reflect a shared understanding in both Riyadh and Tehran that direct confrontation and reciprocal hostilities are counterproductive and risk inviting external interference in a region already fraught with longstanding tensions. In April 2025, this cautious diplomacy took a significant turn when Saudi Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman made a high-profile visit to Iran, where he held talks with top Iranian officials, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Masoud Pezeshkian. This file examines the implications of the visit across three key dimensions: the timing, aims and broader meaning of the trip; the details and symbolism of the meetings — particularly with the supreme leader; and the spectrum of Iranian responses that followed.

### Significations of Timing and Objectives

Although reports suggest that this visit had been under consideration for some time — especially following the earlier high-level trip by the Saudi military chief of staff to Tehran<sup>(32)</sup> — the recent visit by the Saudi minister of defense has added significance. It has sparked discussions about the extent and potential trajectory of Saudi-Iran relations for several key reasons, including:

- The visit carried a weighty message, initiated by the Saudi leadership and marked by the delivery of an official letter from King Salman bin Abdulaziz to Khamenei.<sup>(33)</sup> This exchange highlighted the elevation of Saudi-Iran reconciliation to the level of direct communication between top leaders — a sign of Riyadh's seriousness in advancing regional stability

and resisting any factors that might derail the current trajectory away from conflict.

- The visit also coincided with ongoing negotiations between Iran and the United States, reflecting Saudi Arabia's commitment to supporting diplomatic solutions that can spare the region from the devastation of war and the threats posed by nuclear escalation. Tehran, for its part, appears eager to support this regional calm, interpreting the kingdom's current stance as markedly different from its position during the 2015 nuclear deal talks between Iran and world powers.

- The timing also overlapped with preparations for US President Donald Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia, amid his administration's push to resolve the nuclear file within a set timeframe. In this context, many Iranian intellectuals see Riyadh as playing a potentially crucial mediating role between Tehran and Washington<sup>(34)</sup> — distinct from Israel's hardline position advocating military pressure to halt Iran's nuclear ambitions.

- The visit may have also served as a message to global powers, particularly the United States, affirming Saudi Arabia's resolve to honor its diplomatic agreements, notably the reconciliation pact with Iran. It signaled that the kingdom is unlikely to be swayed by external developments that conflict with its strategic interests.

### Saudi Defense Minister Meets the Supreme Leader and Iranian Officials

The visit by the Saudi defense minister drew notable attention from Iranian media outlets, many of which highlighted its timing and potential benefits. The official IRNA news agency described the visit as highly significant from multiple angles. Prominent political figure Mohammad-Ali Abtahi remarked that the visit reflected Saudi Arabia's intent to enhance

security cooperation with Iran. He added that beyond its security dimension, the trip signaled a broader diplomatic opening between the two nations — one that could lay the groundwork for expanded collaboration in economic, cultural and political spheres. Abtahi also praised Saudi Arabia's initiative, characterizing it as a commendable step given the current regional context.<sup>(35)</sup>

The visit took on added significance following the Saudi defense minister's meeting with Khamenei, during which he delivered a personal letter from King Salman bin Abdulaziz. The exchange underscored the commitment of both nations to engage at the highest levels of leadership. The minister also held talks with Iranian President Pezeshkian, the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Akbar Ahmadian and Chief of General Staff Major General Mohammad Bagheri. These meetings reflected the comprehensive nature of the visit, encompassing both political dialogue and security cooperation and signaling a broadening of bilateral engagement across key strategic sectors.

The symbolism of the visit was further reinforced by the composition of the Saudi delegation accompanying the defense minister which included senior figures such as the chief of General Staff, the deputy defense minister for executive affairs, Royal Court advisor Khaled Hadrawi and the Saudi ambassador to Yemen. The presence of this diverse and high-ranking delegation signaled a serious intent to deepen engagement and build mutual trust between Riyadh and Tehran. This development is particularly significant given the shifting regional landscape — marked by President Trump's return to the White House and renewed negotiations over Iran's nuclear program

— which places additional weight on Saudi-Iran coordination in shaping the region's future.

### **Attempts at Obstructing Rapprochement**

Despite the generally positive Iranian reception of the visit and the apparent momentum toward strengthening Saudi-Iran relations — especially amid hopes in Tehran for economic relief tied to progress on the nuclear file—there are still some dissenting voices. These elements appear resistant to reconciliation and seek to preserve a lingering sense of estrangement between the two countries. In a telling example, just days after the defense minister's visit, the Saudi foreign minister was targeted in a satirical segment aired by Nasim Channel, a state-affiliated entertainment network. The program, known for its wry commentary on political and social issues, mocked the Saudi official, highlighting the persistence of skepticism and hostile sentiment within certain Iranian media circles.<sup>(36)</sup>

The segment mocking the Saudi foreign minister triggered mixed reactions within Iran. Some observers viewed it as an unintended misstep, arguing that such actions could damage Iran's strategic interests. However, subsequent investigations revealed that the act was deliberate.<sup>(37)</sup> Despite this, Iranian authorities refrained from taking disciplinary action against the channel or those involved in producing the program — a move widely interpreted as symbolic appeasement that falls short of matching the depth of Saudi Arabia's efforts to advance bilateral rapprochement.

In response, former Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Commander Brigadier General Saeed Mohammed expressed strong criticism via his X (formerly Twitter) account. He urged security

officials to identify and prosecute those behind the offensive segment, questioning the inaction in the face of such provocations. Mohammed stated, “If you’re serious about influencing public opinion, start by putting on trial the person who ordered and produced the video insulting Saudi officials on the Iranian Radio and Television Network. It is no coincidence that whenever Saudi-Iran relations begin to improve, certain actors — seemingly aligned with Israeli interests — resort to embassy attacks or media provocations to derail progress.”<sup>(38)</sup>

It seems that certain factions continue to benefit from perpetuating tensions, viewing improved Gulf-Iran relations as a threat to their own interests. The recent insult aired by Nasim TV amid ongoing diplomatic engagement serves as a stark reminder of this internal resistance. While some Iranian voices dismissed the incident as an isolated misstep, it nonetheless exposed the enduring divisions within Iran over its strategic direction — particularly in its relationship with Saudi Arabia and the wider Gulf region.

This ambivalence is further reflected in the continued skepticism among Iranian policymakers and elites regarding the value of stable, transparent relations with neighboring states. The challenge of managing the Saudi-Iran relationship is compounded by a host of unresolved issues, requiring careful navigation to avoid slipping back into cycles of hostility. Nonetheless, the Gulf states’ supportive stance on reviving nuclear negotiations signals a preference for diplomacy, highlighting a shared interest in addressing one of the most contentious and consequential issues shaping regional dynamics.

## Conclusion

The Gulf Cooperation Council, with Saudi Arabia at the forefront, is actively working to advance the reconciliation process with Iran and bring an end to longstanding regional tensions. A recent example of these efforts was Riyadh’s offer of assistance to Iran following the explosion at Shahid Rajaei port — an initiative that underscores the kingdom’s commitment to moving the region away from polarization and counterproductive rivalries, toward greater stability and shared development.

This stands in contrast to the visible hesitation and internal division within Iranian discourse, particularly as Iran faces mounting challenges. However, it appears that both Gulf and Iranian actors now recognize the mutual benefits of improved ties. As a result, a phase of sustained calm and diplomatic engagement may lie ahead — one grounded in gradual cooperation rather than ideological or geopolitical posturing that has long undermined regional interests.

Importantly, through the high-level visit of the Saudi defense minister — bearing a letter from the Saudi king to Iran’s supreme leader — the kingdom has clearly articulated a vision rooted in shared regional interests. This move signals not only a willingness to normalize relations, but also a broader message to Iran and international powers alike: the kingdom’s current foreign policy emphasizes sovereignty and should be approached with that principle in mind.

# **IRAN'S RELATIONS WITH INTERNATIONAL POWERS**

Iran continues to navigate complex relationships with global powers. Nuclear negotiations between Iran and the United States have resumed, drawing international scrutiny. Meanwhile, Israel remains highly attentive to these discussions, closely monitoring their implications. At the same time, Iran and Türkiye maintain a dynamic relationship characterized by both rivalry and cooperation, reflecting the intricate balance of their geopolitical interests.

## Iran and the United States Resume Nuclear Talks Amid International Scrutiny

Despite their hardline rhetoric, the United States and Iran resumed nuclear negotiations in April 2025, conducting several rounds of talks in Oman and Italy. While the European trio — the UK, France and Germany — has not yet joined the discussions, progress was suddenly interrupted when Washington insisted on banning even limited uranium enrichment in Iran. This file explores three main developments: the status of the nuclear negotiations, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi's recent visit to Tehran and the extent of European influence in pressuring Iran.

### The Vortex of Nuclear Talks

US President Donald Trump's unpredictable approach to foreign policy has raised concerns in Tehran, particularly for Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. However, recent backchannel communications have provided some reassurance to the Iranian leadership. Washington has also conveyed to Tehran that it will not back Israeli military plans targeting Iran's nuclear facilities. Following a meeting with the Israeli prime minister, Trump told reporters he was not rushing into any confrontation with Iran, noting that Tehran was showing interest in dialogue.<sup>(39)</sup>

The first meeting between US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi was described by both sides as "constructive," although negotiations remain indirect.<sup>(40)</sup> On April 14, 2025, Witkoff appeared to align with the now-defunct Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), acknowledging Iran's right to enrich uranium up to 3.67 percent. However, he quickly walked back his remarks

on X, urging Iran to halt its nuclear enrichment and weapons development.<sup>(41)</sup> Meanwhile, Iran hawks within the Trump administration continues to push for a complete stop to Iranian enrichment as part of a potential new agreement.

On April 16, Foreign Minister Araghchi criticized the United States for its shifting stance on nuclear talks, calling it "not helpful" but affirming that Tehran would continue negotiations to clarify Washington's real intentions. Araghchi defended Iran's nuclear enrichment program as essential for fueling power reactors and emphasized that while Tehran was open to building trust over potential concerns, the issue of enrichment itself remained off the table.<sup>(42)</sup>

The Trump administration is attempting to roll back the Obama-era recognition of Iran's right to conduct limited uranium enrichment under international oversight. This right, capped at 3.67% enrichment, was a cornerstone of the 2013 interim nuclear deal and the 2015 JCPOA. However, since Trump withdrew from the JCPOA, Iran has increased its enrichment level to 60%, bringing it significantly closer to the 90% threshold required for weapons-grade material.

Despite Witkoff's reversal on the uranium enrichment issue, Araghchi stated that the second round of talks held in Rome on April 19 had led to progress and a clearer mutual understanding of objectives. He urged both sides to reach an agreement as soon as possible. Responding to Washington's continued rejection of Iran's enrichment activities, Mohammad Eslami, head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, defended the program, describing uranium enrichment

as “a symbol of Iran’s independence and national power.”<sup>(43)</sup>

The fourth round of US-Iran nuclear talks, originally set for May 3 in Rome, was postponed. Omani Foreign Minister cited “logistical reasons” for the delay, noting that new dates would be announced once both sides agreed.<sup>(44)</sup>

Meanwhile, Ali Larijani, a senior advisor to Iran’s supreme leader, expressed skepticism about the value of the negotiations. He stated “Holding or not holding negotiations per se has no value, but the main criterion is the fulfillment of the national interests. If the talks do not result in the fulfillment of the interests, there will be no justification for proceeding with them.”<sup>(45)</sup>

### **Grossi’s Visit to Tehran**

Amid ongoing challenges facing nuclear inspectors, Grossi visited Tehran from April 15 to April 16 for talks with senior Iranian officials. During the meetings, Grossi stressed that resolving the agency’s outstanding concerns is essential, as any new agreement would be contingent on verifiable compliance. He underscored that cooperation with the IAEA is “indispensable” for offering credible assurances that Iran’s nuclear program remains peaceful.<sup>(46)</sup> Thanks to advancements in monitoring technology, the agency is now better equipped to detect illicit activities at large enrichment sites — particularly the re-infusion of enriched uranium into centrifuges, which is the quickest path to weapons-grade material — through enhanced tools such as surveillance cameras.

### **Europe’s Trump Card to Pressure Iran**

Iran and the European trio have not held direct talks since January, despite plans to meet ahead of the now-postponed fourth round of US-Iran negotiations. As transatlantic ties face strain over declin-

ing US support for Ukraine, rising trade tensions with allies, and Washington’s wavering commitment to NATO, European concerns over Iran have intensified. Key issues include Tehran’s support for Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, significant advancements in uranium enrichment, involvement in terrorism, and the detention of European nationals. In March 2025, the European trio sharply criticized Iran for record-high enrichment levels, the installation of advanced centrifuges, lack of cooperation with inspectors, and threats to exit the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).<sup>(47)</sup>

Under UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which is set to expire in October 2025, the three European countries retain the authority to trigger the reimposition of international sanctions on Iran. Although the United States withdrew from the JCPOA and forfeited its rights under the deal, China and Russia remain parties to the agreement and could politically oppose new sanctions. However, they do not hold veto power over this specific mechanism. If the European push for sanctions is not resolved within 30 days, all previous UN sanctions on Iran would automatically be reinstated, including measures such as cargo inspections and bans on arms and missile-related technology. To prevent the European trio from taking such action at the Security Council, Tehran may seek to re-engage the Europeans in a more constructive dialogue, particularly if broader negotiations falter.

### **Conclusion**

The looming October deadline for the UN snapback mechanism is still months away, but President Trump is eager to strike an early deal with Iran using a mix of incentives and pressure. While his goal of securing a breakthrough within his first 100 days in office proved unrealistic, the United States has shifted to a more

forceful posture, adopting a maximalist public stance. Recent strikes on Iran-aligned groups in Yemen appear to have led to behind-the-scenes understandings brokered by Oman, with Iran reportedly playing a role — signaling that Washington’s pressure campaign may be yielding results.

Iran, however, has heavily invested in projecting itself as a near-nuclear power, and backing down now could pose significant political and reputational costs for the country’s leadership. Tehran continues to stockpile uranium enriched to 60 percent, maintains a diverse arsenal of ballistic and cruise missiles, and is advancing intercontinental missile capabilities under the cover of its space program. As a result, both Washington and Tehran are expected to maintain hardline rhetoric while methodically pursuing calculated strategies behind the scenes as long as negotiations persist.

### **The Israeli Position Toward the US-Iran Nuclear Talks**

International reactions to the renewed US-Iran nuclear talks have been mixed. While many countries have welcomed the diplomatic initiative, Israel remains firmly opposed, urging Washington to abandon negotiations in favor of a military solution. Israeli officials have repeatedly threatened to launch strikes on Iran’s nuclear facilities, reflecting deep skepticism about the effectiveness of diplomacy. These tensions are unfolding against the backdrop of renewed Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip, which have escalated regional instability and heightened friction between Israel and neighboring states.

This file also explores Tehran’s response to Israel’s hardline stance and assesses the extent to which Israeli pressure could influence the trajectory and outcome of the nuclear negotiations.

### **The Israeli Position Toward the Nuclear Talks Between Iran and the United States**

Israel, consistent with its longstanding opposition to Iran’s nuclear program, voiced significant concerns over the Oman-mediated nuclear talks between the United States and Iran. While US President Trump’s agreement with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons may have eased tensions in this regard between the two allies, Israel’s stance remained firm. During his visit to Washington on April 7, 2025, Netanyahu cited the Libya model — which led to the complete dismantling of the country’s nuclear program — as a benchmark for a successful agreement. He also reiterated his desire to align with Trump on military action should diplomacy fail,<sup>(48)</sup> including the potential for striking Iranian nuclear facilities.

Alongside these diplomatic efforts, Israeli officials continued to issue statements, many of which hinted at the possibility of a limited military strike on Iran’s nuclear sites in the near future. Despite Trump informing Netanyahu that the United States was not ready to back such an action, Israeli officials believe that their military could conduct a smaller-scale strike on Iran’s nuclear infrastructure with minimal US involvement, far less extensive than initially proposed.<sup>(49)</sup>

### **Iranian Reactions to the Israeli Position**

Iranian officials have strongly reacted to Israeli statements regarding potential military action. Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi warned that any Israeli attack would be met with an immediate and equivalent response. On social media, he warned of Israel’s attempts to derail diplomatic progress between Iran and the United States, asserting that Iran’s security and intelligence agencies are prepared to confront any sabotage or ter-

rorism intended to provoke a legitimate Iranian retaliation.<sup>(50)</sup>

During a parliamentary session on April 29, Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf pointed out that Israel would not take such actions without US approval. He warned that any Israeli attack on Iran would “ignite a powder keg,” with Iranian retaliation targeting US military bases in neighboring countries and implicating those nations in Israel’s aggressive actions.<sup>(51)</sup>

Araghchi also attempted to drive a wedge between the United States and Israel, accusing Israel of trying to sabotage the negotiations to prevent a nuclear agreement. In a post on X, he criticized Netanyahu’s interference in US diplomacy, stating: “Netanyahu is attempting to brazenly DICTATE what President Trump can and cannot do in his diplomacy with Iran.”<sup>(52)</sup>

### **The Extent of Israeli Influence Over the Negotiations**

Direct military confrontations between Iran and Israel have highlighted the United States’ central role in managing tensions. Despite Israeli officials frequently expressing their intent to target Iran’s nuclear program, it is unlikely that Israel would undertake such a strategic move without approval from the United States, especially amid the ongoing conflict in Gaza. Some in Israel view cooperation with the United States as the most effective route to safeguarding Israeli interests, recognizing that Israel is unable to completely dismantle Iran’s nuclear capabilities and can only stall its nuclear development.<sup>(53)</sup>

On the other hand, Trump’s personal approach to foreign policy limits the Israeli government’s ability to influence his decisions. As such, any potential Israeli military strike on Iran’s nuclear facilities

would, in essence, be driven by an American decision — if Trump reaches the conclusion that it is necessary. Trump has made it clear that he does not fear Netanyahu’s influence in dragging the United States into a war with Iran, stating that he would intervene “voluntarily” should a nuclear deal with Iran fail to materialize.<sup>(54)</sup>

Israel’s threats and even sabotage operations targeting Iran could be seen as having the backing of the Trump administration, especially since such actions align with the broader strategy of applying pressure on Tehran to secure concessions in nuclear negotiations. The explosion at Shahid Rajaei port, for instance, may be part of this strategy, potentially being an act of sabotage in line with Israel’s “1,000 Stabs” approach, now more intricate and covert. These sabotage acts are often framed as “accidents,” with a cloud of ambiguity surrounding the specifics of each incident.<sup>(55)</sup>

This theory is further supported by Trump’s remarks, denying that he prevented Israel from attacking Iranian nuclear sites. He clarified, “That’s not true. I didn’t stop them. But I didn’t make it comfortable for them.”<sup>(56)</sup> This suggests that Trump may have intentionally limited the scope of these operations, restricting them to sabotage efforts that fit within his overall vision, rather than allowing full-scale military attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities.

### **Conclusion**

The situation surrounding Israel’s stance on the Iranian nuclear issue is marked by uncertainty, largely due to the unpredictability of Trump’s next steps. Although Trump has made clear his intent to dismantle Iran’s nuclear program, there is a possibility he might take actions that diverge from Israeli interests. Compound-

ing this challenge is the ongoing war Israel has been engaged in since October 2023, which has had significant internal and external repercussions. These events have constrained Israel's ability to take decisive action against Iran's nuclear program, making an Israeli strike without US backing a highly risky proposition.

In response to Israeli threats, Iran has combined its warnings of severe retaliation — potentially targeting US interests — with efforts to drive a wedge between Trump and Netanyahu. Iran's strategy seems to focus on exploiting any differences between the United States and Israel, hoping to undermine the pressure campaign and influence the broader geopolitical landscape in its favor.

### **Iran and Türkiye: A Complex Duality of Rivalry and Cooperation**

Iran-Türkiye relations stand out within the broader Middle East due to their unique blend of rivalry and cooperation, shaped by a long history of geopolitical competition and overlapping interests. Both nations aim to reinforce their roles as influential regional powers, a dynamic that plays out across several flashpoints, particularly in Syria, the Caucasus and Iraq. These areas reveal the convergence — and at times, the collision — of their political, military and economic agendas.

Developments in April 2025 point to a shift in their relationship toward a phase of cautious escalation. This new chapter is marked by increasing entanglement across spheres such as security, energy, trade and even pragmatic alliances that transcend ideological lines. A wave of meetings, initiatives and tactical maneuvers has emerged, signaling each side's determination to preserve its influence while also deploying measures of deterrence and forming situational partner-

ships, underscoring deep-rooted tensions.

What makes this stage particularly noteworthy for Iran-Türkiye interactions is the wide array of active fronts — ranging from the Azerbaijani-Armenian border and Northern Syria to energy talks and strategic trade routes. These developments suggest that Ankara and Tehran's interactions have outgrown the simple categories of “conflict” or “alliance,” now operating within a far more intricate and strategic framework shaped by regional complexities.

This file explores three central issues in this evolving relationship: the Syrian theater as a site of both confrontation and negotiation; joint efforts to revive railway and natural gas infrastructure projects; and growing Iranian discontent over Türkiye's arrest of an academic, alongside internal tensions involving Kurdish

Turkic groups in Iran.

### **Syria as an Arena for Dispute and Dialogue Between Türkiye and Iran**

In April 2025, Syria once again emerged as a key arena for indirect confrontation between Iran and Türkiye, as regional and international powers intensified efforts to redraw spheres of influence. A particularly sensitive development took place in the Azerbaijani capital, Baku, where delegations from Türkiye and Israel — under US mediation — held talks on influence demarcation in Syria.<sup>(57)</sup> Central areas such as Palmyra were a focal point of the discussions, with Israel reportedly designating the city as a red line against any future Turkish military movements.

Despite efforts by Ankara to signal an intention to coordinate, its official rhetoric remained forceful. The Turkish Ministry of Defense condemned Israel's continued airstrikes on Syrian territory as violations undermining Syrian sover-

eignty and threatening broader regional stability. It further urged the international community to adopt a firm and unified stance to restrain Israeli actions.

Iran, increasingly sidelined in the Syrian arena due to mounting economic constraints and regional setbacks, is viewing the recent wave of regional understandings with growing alarm. Its exclusion from the emerging arrangements risks eroding its long-held status as a key player in Syria, while simultaneously enabling Türkiye and Israel to assert greater influence in northern and eastern regions — potentially at Tehran's expense.

According to a report by Shargh newspaper, this marginalization may not be a temporary phase but rather the beginning of a broader shift toward the de facto partitioning of Syria into semi-permanent zones of control, shaped by circumstantial agreements among external powers. Such a trajectory poses a serious strategic threat to the depth and continuity of Iranian influence across the Levant.

### **Economic Cooperation to Revitalize Railway Projects and Gas Networks**

On the economic front, discussions have resumed regarding the revival of the Tehran-Ankara railway, a key strategic land transport corridor. The line had been suspended following the devastating earthquake that struck Türkiye last year. Its relaunch reflects a shared interest in revitalizing logistical cooperation and upgrading bilateral infrastructure, as both countries seek to assert stronger roles within the evolving framework of regional connectivity.

In a related move, the city of Urmia saw the inauguration of a new office for the Iranian-Turkish Joint Chamber of Commerce — an initiative aimed at formalizing trade operations and boosting cross-border exchanges. The step further

underscores Urmia's growing role as a vital gateway for commerce with Türkiye, especially amid increasing dependence on overland trade routes.

Meanwhile, Iran has deepened its energy cooperation with Armenia through a gas swap arrangement involving Turkmenistan.<sup>(58)</sup> This move signals Tehran's strategic intent to counterbalance Russian-Azerbaijani dominance over the energy landscape in the Caucasus and to push back against Turkish-Azerbaijani initiatives aimed at establishing alternative transit routes to southern Armenia — projects that could significantly alter the region's geopolitical equilibrium.

By engaging in this energy swap, Iran seeks to position itself more prominently as a key transit hub in the broader network connecting Asian energy supplies to European markets, thereby reinforcing its role as a pivotal player in the evolving regional energy map.

### **Iranian Anger Over the Arrest of a University Professor in Türkiye and Disputes Between Kurds and Iranian Turks**

On the security front, the arrest of prominent Iranian academic Ahmad Reza Beyzaei by Turkish authorities ignited a wave of criticism and concern within Iran. Tehran denounced the move as “hostile and unjustified,”<sup>(59)</sup> particularly given the absence of clear legal grounds and the existence of ongoing diplomatic communication between the two countries. The incident has been widely interpreted as a sign of the fragile nature of mutual trust and a possible indication that security matters may increasingly be leveraged as instruments of political pressure.

Analysts also noted the arrest's timing — amid heightened regional sensitivities in the Caucasus and Syria — as potentially carrying implicit political undertones.

Given Beyzaei's background as a cultural and academic figure with no known security links, the incident was viewed as especially provocative and reflective of deeper strains in the bilateral relationship.

Domestically, the Iranian city of Urmia has been at the center of a heated debate over language use in city council sessions. Kurdish council members have strongly advocated for their right to speak Kurdish, challenging the decision to adopt Turkish as the sole language of communication. This dispute has brought ethnic tensions to the forefront in this multi-ethnic region near the Turkish border, reigniting discussions on national identity and state cohesion. The controversy comes at a time when local issues are increasingly intertwined with broader regional dynamics, raising concerns about potential implications for Iran's internal stability.

Urmia, home to a diverse population of Azeris, Kurds, Assyrians and Armenians, serves as a delicate example of how multiculturalism is managed within Iran. Any perceived imbalance in linguistic or political representation could spark social unrest, especially as nationalist sentiments and distinct sub-identities continue to rise in some peripheral areas.

### **Conclusion**

The developments of April 2025 highlight that Iran-Türkiye relations are shaped by a delicate equilibrium, where economic cooperation — driven by geographical and geopolitical necessities — coexists

with strategic competition, particularly concerning regional influence and dominance. While both Tehran and Ankara strive to avert direct confrontation, their intersecting actions on critical issues such as Syria, the Caucasus, and energy indicate that an undeclared conflict between the two powers remains ongoing.

Both Iran and Türkiye are actively working to bolster their influence in key regions. Iran is pursuing an alternative regional axis through partnerships with Armenia and Central Asia, while Türkiye aims to expand its footprint in northern Syria and assert itself on sensitive regional issues. Diplomatic efforts surrounding the Iranian nuclear issue are expected to intensify in the coming month, with Omani mediation playing a significant role. Simultaneously, Iran continues to challenge Turkish-Azerbaijani initiatives through energy leverage and alternative alliances.

This dynamic suggests that while the relationship between the two countries is becoming increasingly complex, it is unlikely to reach the point of complete rupture. The volatile regional environment, coupled with the interconnectedness of both nations with international powers such as Russia and the United States, necessitates a more flexible and tactical approach rather than direct confrontation. Economic factors, particularly energy corridors and land links, are set to play a crucial role in maintaining this delicate balance, as both sides strive to solidify their influence without escalating tensions to a breaking point.

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