

IRAN

1400 BRIEF

۱۴۰۰

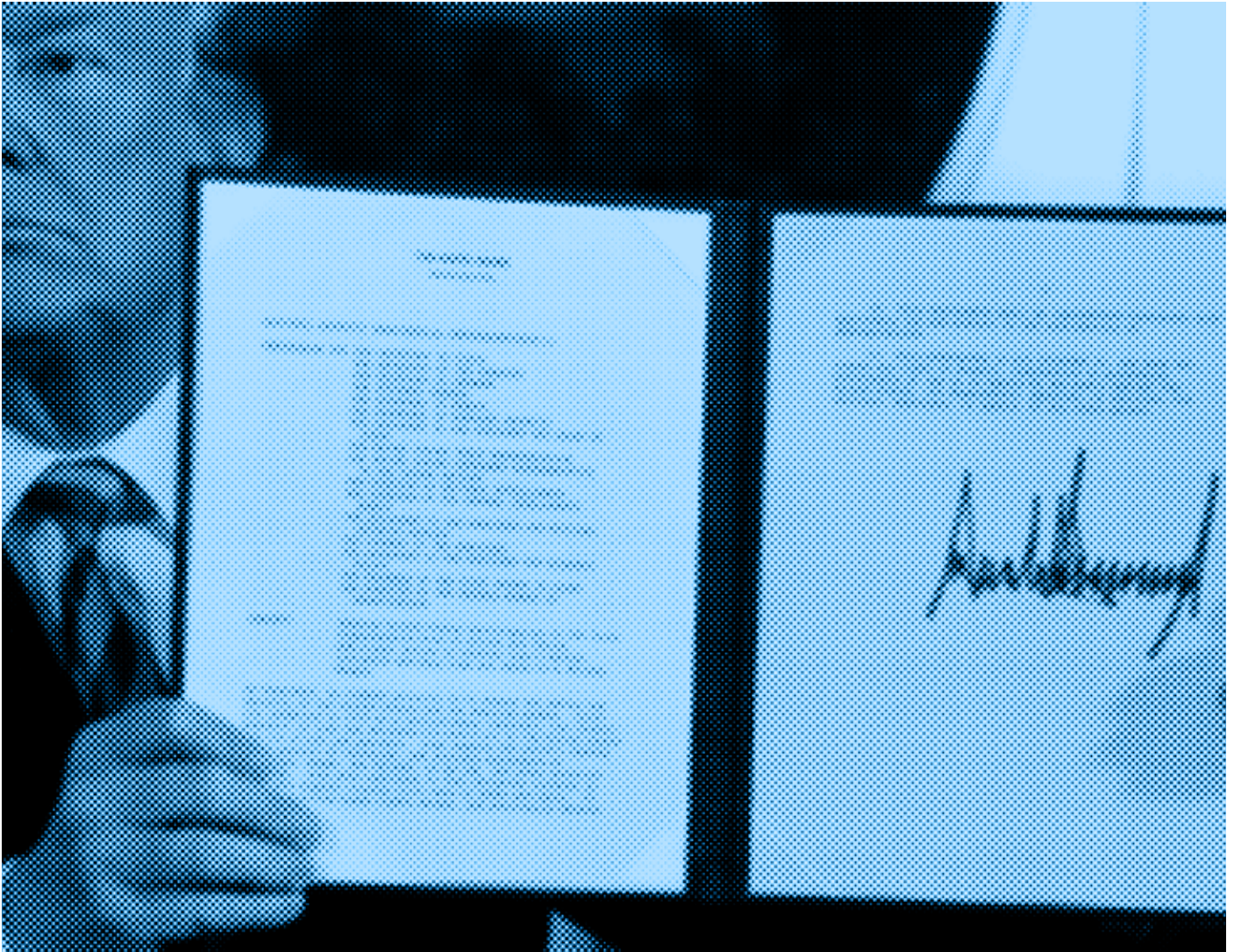
BEYOND THE HEADLINES

ایران



FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
STIFTUNG Für die Freiheit.
Middle East and North Africa

17/05 – 23/05



SUMMARY



With the negotiations over the JCPOA's revival ongoing, it is not clear how much progress can be expected soon, given contradicting accounts over the extent of U.S. sanctions relief and whether Iran is being pressured to concede on non-nuclear issues of concern, namely regional policies (also given the recent escalation of key Western ally Israel with Tehran-sponsored Palestinian Hamas). Yet, with Iran extending the IAEA agreement by one month, more time is now available for talks but a conclusion seems to be unrealistic before the 18 June Iran presidential elections. On the latter subject, former Parliament Speaker and nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani has made a blitz media and social media campaign offensive, pitting him now as a centrist against hardliner-favoured Ebrahim Raisi in what could become a bipolar race for the presidency.



INTERNATIONAL

Amid ongoing talks in Vienna over the revival of the JCPOA, Iran's President Rouhani has repeated his optimism about all relevant sanctions to be lifted against Tehran, while a much-discussed 22 May deadline on the IAEA's access to Iranian nuclear facilities has ended, which Iran now reportedly want to extend by one month, despite pressure from the hardline-dominated Parliament.

BEYOND the HEADLINES

President Rouhani has reiterated his optimism by stating that the U.S. has "explicitly declared its preparedness to lift sanctions in accordance with the nuclear deal", addressing the 227th meeting of the Government's Economic Coordination Headquarters in Tehran

on 23 May. He added that negotiations will continue until a full agreement is reached. Meanwhile, the controversy over the JCPOA talks has continued between the Rouhani administration and Press TV, Iran's state-owned international broadcaster that is close to the hardliners. Press TV has regularly promoted an opposite narrative about the Vienna talks, emphasizing that Washington has no intention to completely lift any sanctions on the oil, banking, finance, and energy sectors, as officially demanded by Tehran. On 23 May, Ali Rabiei, spokesperson of the Rouhani administration said "this news channel [Press TV] is acting precisely in opposition to national policies on negotiations.... such news coverage, based on informed sources, has a destructive effect on the negotiations and imposes a detriment to national interests."

Moreover, the day before (22 May) the understanding between Iran and the IAEA had expired. In this vein, in a 23 May open parliamentary session,

Parliament Speaker Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf said "The IAEA has no right to access the camera footages and information of the AEOI due to the expiration of the deadline." He added: "We are determined that the 'Law on Strategic Action to Lift Sanctions and Protect the Interests of the Iranian Nation' be implemented at the specific time and in accordance with the ratification, and the Leader has repeatedly emphasized this issue." However, on the very same day, NourNews.ir – an outlet close to the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) – reported that Iran will extend this arrangement with the IAEA for one month, probably a result from a decision by the SNSC itself – an elite body that decides on key national security and foreign policy questions, including Iran's nuclear (escalation) strategy. The week before, the Parliament that is in control of Rouhani's domestic hardline rivals, had issued a statement calling on the government to respect Tehran's official position at the Vienna talks as

well as to end the implementation on the above-mentioned agreement with the IAEA on the NPT's Additional Protocol that pertains to inspectors' access to Iranian nuclear sites. The statement read: "Simultaneous with the Vienna meetings, the parliament emphasizes the policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the necessity for a real removal of all sanctions and its precise verification as the main condition for Iran's adherence to its nuclear undertakings, and underlines that the truthful economic benefit of the Iranian people sets the criterion for assessing and accepting the results of talks between Iran and other nuclear deal member states. [...] Therefore, the parliament does not accept any division and categorization of sanctions that would lead to maintaining a part of the economic pressures against the Iranian people and preventing economic benefits or disrupting them and seriously calls for complete, verifiable and irreversible lifting of sanctions which act as the US weapon, and believes that a partial removal of sanctions would be equal to the remaining of all sanctions, and accepting the remaining of a number of sanctions would mean an endorsement of their legitimacy." The statement also included Iranian concerns over the Western parties' desire to extend

the Iran deal to include regional policy and military aspects: "The Vienna meetings showed that the US and Europe do not yet have a serious will to lift all sanctions as they further seek to impose an agreement on Iran that would put further restrictions on its nuclear operations and pave the way for regional and defence talks." Last but not least, the statement noted that the Law for Strategic Action to Lift Sanctions had "revolutionized" the nuclear programme, while playing a considerable part in pushing the negotiations toward achieving sanctions relief. As such, it called for the implementation of a next step of Iran's "nuclear escalation" strategy (see previous Iran Weeklies): "Therefore, it is necessary for the government to rapidly implement all the technical provisions of this law, including launching of the uranium metal plant, the legal deadline for its operation has expired in accordance with the Article 4 (of the Law)." In fact, as in the past when the law was passed, it seems the parliament statement is directed at the international community to embolden their sense of urgency to bring about a revival of the JCPOA as soon as possible, otherwise a nuclear-armed Iran would more clearly emerge on the horizon. Yet, since Qalibaf himself is an SCSC member, it is more likely that the entire

Iranian state is continuing to pursue the policy of "maximum resistance", of which "nuclear escalation" is a key part – hence the call for a next step in this, i.e. "launching of the uranium metal plant." Already in Feb., the IAEA had confirmed that Iran had produced uranium metal, which can be used to make the core of a nuclear bomb.

On 23 May, U.S. Secretary of State Blinken said to ABC News' This Week programme that Washington would still need to see whether Iran will return to nuclear compliance, perhaps suggesting that the issue of sequencing between that Iranian concession and U.S. lifting sanctions is still contested: "Iran, I think, knows what it needs to do to come back into compliance on nuclear side. And what we haven't yet seen is whether Iran is ready and willing to make a decision to do what it has to do. That's the test and we don't yet have an answer." On the same day, according to an account provided by an Iranian MP, Tehran's chief nuclear negotiator Abbas Araqchi has told the Parliament's Foreign Policy Commission that Washington has made the removal of certain sanctions contingent on the resolution of regional and human rights issues with Iran.

“Iran, I think, knows what it needs to do to come back into compliance on nuclear side. And what we haven't yet seen is whether Iran is ready and willing to make a decision to do what it has to do. That's the test and we don't yet have an answer.”

MILITARY

It remains uncertain at which stage the Vienna negotiations are, as key stumbling blocks are difficult to overcome, especially Tehran's desire for a full and verifiable removal of onerous U.S. sanctions and the desire by some Western states to address Iran's regional policies and ballistic missile programme. These areas are likely to have become more imminent given the recently ended armed conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

BEYOND *the* HEADLINES

In an unprecedented manner, Hamas had launched about 3,000 rockets at Israel. The rockets' precision and reach cannot be compared to those from Lebanese Hezbollah, but Hamas' capabilities here have improved. In view of the high number of Hamas rockets launched, Israel's Iron Dome missile defence system had come under stress, unable to destroy all incoming rockets from Gaza. The Hamas rocket arsenal seems to have been clearly built with Iranian support over the past decade when rockets, spare parts and rocket technicians had reach the Gaza Strip from Iran. While these older materials may have already been used before this new recent crisis, it seems that Hamas has now obtained the know-how to make such rockets. During the recent escalation, Hamas and Islamic Jihad fighters had praised Iranian military as well as overall support. In his Qods Day

celebration speech, Supreme Leader Khamenei had included a section in Arabic in which he stated that unlike in the past when Palestinians had to defend themselves by stones, they were now able to resist with the help of precision rockets against Israeli aggression. It is believed that Iranian support for Hamas amounts to \$30 million per month. Yet, despite the fact that Tehran and Hamas regard the recent outcome as a victory of their "axis of resistance" against Israel, the timing of the war coinciding with the ongoing Vienna talks had put limits to Tehran fully using this incident for propaganda purposes (despite the IRGC chief's remarks) as it could embolden the Western parties – all of whom have routinely stood in solidarity with Israel as their *raison d'état* – to pressure Tehran on its support for Hamas.





SOCIETAL

Narges Mohammadi, a prominent Iranian rights activist, has been sentenced to 30 months in jail, 80 lashes and a fine, according to her husband. In October 2020, she had been released from prison over concerns for her health.

BEYOND *the* HEADLINES

Given the international reputation of Narges Mohammadi, her case may risk to become an issue of concern for Western states that are currently in talks with Tehran over the revival of the JCPOA. Last summer, the cases of prominent human-rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh and the executed Iranian wrestling star Navid Afkari has poisoned Tehran's relations with the West, leading to heightened voices of criticism, especially in Europe, over Iran policy.

POLITICAL

With the Iran's 18 June presidential elections soon approaching and candidates registered, the ultra-conservative Guardian Council is poised to announce those qualified to run on 25 May. It seems a bipolar electoral rivalry among the politically dominating wider conservative establishment is emerging, pitting ultra-conservative Ebrahim Raisi against centrist Ali Larijani.

BEYOND the HEADLINES

This week, Ali Larijani campaign made a blitz media and social media (including the popular online audio app Clubhouse) offensive. Larijani, one of the most senior politicians of the Islamic Republic, is a former Speaker of Parliament and chief nuclear negotiator. In his campaign, he is branding himself as a man of deeds who will take a non-ideological stance geared towards improving Iranians' dire economic situation, also banking on his pro-JCPOA position amid many hardliners' rejection of the deal. [In his first Clubhouse appearance with more than 3,000 participants](#), Larijani positioned himself a de facto centrist, saying he is neither a reformist nor a principalist (Iran's wider conservative camp). [Asked about whether Foreign Minister Zarif, who had not registered his candidacy in the wake of the leaked interview](#) (see previous Iran Weekly), may become his running mate, he replied: "anything is possible... I consider Zarif to be a very capable person, and he has performed very well in the nuclear negotiations." [Also, in an interview with Lebanese Al Mayadeen TV](#) (a pro-Tehran and "axis of resistance" network), Larijani said his decision to run in the presidential elections was because the other candidates were



too similar and voters deserved a real choice. He also praised Iran's foreign policy engagement, including the 25-year deal with China, and favoured progress in talks with Riyadh as well as Washington. Later, Larijani entered a Twitter argument with Saeed Jalili (who also once served as Iran's chief nuclear negotiator) who is rumoured to be Raisi's running mate. In a nutshell, Larijani is trying to brand himself very

much like Rouhani did in his electoral campaigns, as an able manager of state affairs who can improved people's economic standing and probably also their political situation. As such, the hardliners have already started attacking him as another Rouhani who will abjectly disappoint people's trust and never make good on his campaign promises, [especially regarding their material needs](#). In fact, this emerging

Raisi vs. Ali Larijani bipolarity may (yet to be seen, though) be traded by the regime as a new "lesser evil, larger evil" choice. However, Larijani, who is part of a powerful regime clan with two of his brothers being top politicians, will be able to overcome voter apathy and to channel pro-reform voters to cast their ballots for him remains unclear. Also, Raisi's chances to become the next Supreme Leader would be immensely

undermined if he loses the race for the presidency despite much hardline support. By now, [Larijani's social media presence on Telegram](#), Instagram and Twitter has catapulted him from outside the top ten into the pole position, followed by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (who is expected to be disqualified by the Guardian Council) and his main contender Ebrahim Raisi.



AUTHOR

Dr. Ali Fathollah-Nejad (Ph.D. SOAS) is a German-Iranian political scientist with a focus on Iran, the Middle East, the post-unipolar world order, and right-wing populism in Europe. He is the author of the much-acclaimed *Iran in an Emerging New World Order: From Ahmadinejad to Rouhani* (Palgrave Macmillan's Studies in Iranian Politics, May 2021) and of the *Iran 1400 Brief: Beyond the Headlines* weekly newsletter (Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom's Middle East and North Africa program). Based in Berlin, he is a Non-Resident Senior Research Fellow at the Afro-Middle East Centre (AMEC), South Africa's think-tank specialized on the Middle East, as well as affiliated researcher with *Centre d'Études de la Coopération Internationale et du Développement (CECID)* at *Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB)* as well as *Freie Universität (FU) Berlin's Center for Middle Eastern and North African Politics*. In 2020, he published two monographs: *The*

Islamic Republic of Iran Four Decades On: The 2017/18 Protests Amid a Triple Crisis (Brookings Analysis Paper) and *The Politics of Culture in Times of Rapprochement: European Cultural and Academic Exchange with Iran (2015–16)* (Wissenschaftsverlag WeltTrends).

Ali holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from the Department of Development Studies at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) University of London and was a *post-doctoral Associate* with the Harvard Kennedy School's Iran Project. Also, he had been the in-house Iran expert at the Brookings Institution's Middle East center in Doha (BDC, 2017–20) and the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP, 2015–18).

He has taught globalization and development in the Middle East, contemporary Iran, the Arab Revolts and great-power politics at the University of Tübingen (as

Senior Lecturer in Middle East and Comparative Politics), in the Ph.D. program of Qatar University's Gulf Studies Center, at FU Berlin's Center for Middle Eastern and North African Politics, the University of Westminster, SOAS etc. Due to COVID-19, his Visiting Professorship at the Centre for International Studies of the University of Economics in Prague is postponed.

His about 200 analytical pieces in English, German, and French have been translated into a dozen languages. A frequent speaker at academic conferences and political forums, he regularly contributes to leading international media outlets in English, German, and French. Ali is fluent in German, French, English, and Persian, and reads Dutch.

<https://www.fathollah-nejad.eu/>





اتحاد جماهیر شوروی

U. S. S. R.

TURKEY

ترکیه

CASPIAN SEA

دریای مازندران

عراق

TEHRAN

ISFAHAN

AHWAZ

SHIRAZ

KUWAIT

عربستان سعودی
SAUDI ARABIA

نمایش علامات

LEGEND

- 1. SOIL WITH NO OR SLIGHT LIMITATIONS
1. No important problem except locally
- 2. SOIL WITH SLIGHT TO MODERATE LIMITATIONS
2. Limitations due to moderate deficit of water and undulating relief
- 3. SOILS WITH MODERATE TO SEVERE LIMITATIONS
3. Limitations due to moderate to strong deficit of water or shallow depth
- 4. SOILS WITH SEVERE TO VERY SEVERE LIMITATIONS
4. Limitations due to dissected relief, shallow depth and severe deficit of water
- 5. SOILS WITH ALMOST NO POTENTIALITY
5. Sand dunes
- 5. Solonchaks, salt marshes, saliferous and gypsiferous marls

دریاچه Lake
SCALE 1: 2,500,000

freiheit.org/mena
THE WORLD SOIL RESOURCES OFFICE
LAND AND WATER DEVELOPMENT DIVISION - FAO