

# IRAN

## 1400 BRIEF

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BEYOND THE HEADLINES

ایران

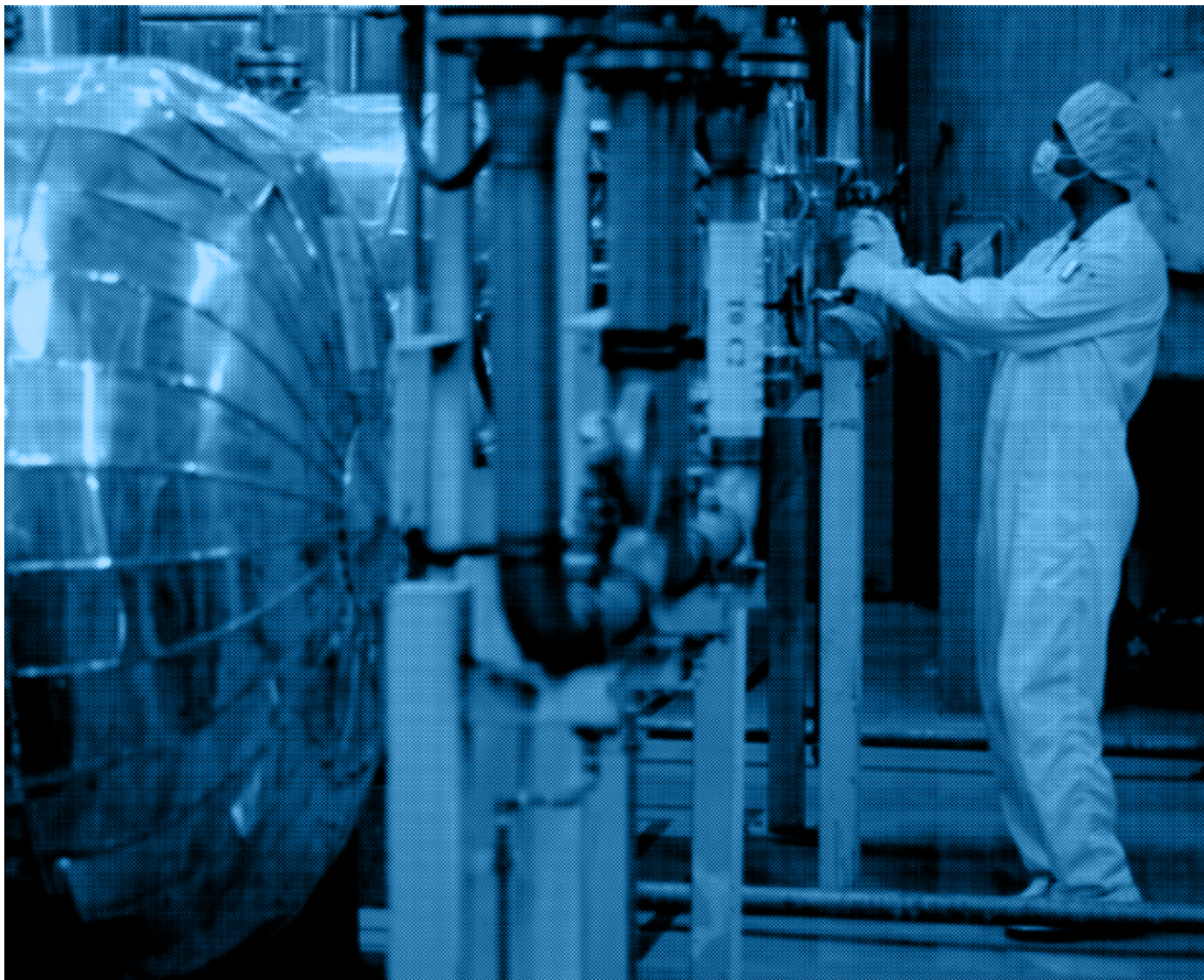


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# SUMMARY



This week, amid high levels of dissatisfaction of the Iranian people from their authorities after the historically low voter turnout in the last presidential election, opposition groups outside of Iran are trying to capitalize on this moment by urging the U.S. and Israel to pressure the Islamic Republic, even to the point of “regime change.” However, such calls are likely to be fruitless given the Biden administration’s rejection of such an idea and their disconnect with domestic movements calling for radical change at home. Internationally, disagreements between the main antagonists Iran and the U.S. have remained in place regarding the revival of the nuclear deal, as Iran

continues to boost its leverage towards the U.S., this time by producing uranium metal enriched up to 20%. In terms of security, Iran faced several ambiguous accidents on its train network, power generation and an explosion near an organization which is likely related to Iran’s nuclear program. Regarding the coronavirus pandemic, the lack of a realistic vaccination schedule as well as the extremely low vaccination rate of probably 1% is extending the dual public health and economic crisis in a country which claims that its “made in Iran” vaccines (whose efficiency is unclear) surpasses the number of all tested vaccines in the world.



# EXILED OPPOSITION & U.S. POLICY ON IRAN

This week, opposition groups outside of Iran were active to call for pressure toward the Islamic Republic. In an unprecedented invitation, Iran's exiled Crown Prince [Reza Pahlavi](#) was invited to give a speech in front of the presidents of 50 major American Jewish organizations. Although the meeting has been behind closed doors, an informed source told *Iran International*, a Persian-language satellite TV based in London, "Prince Reza Pahlavi asked all the groups present to use their influence in Washington to continue to exert pressure on the Islamic Republic and to show maximum support for the Iranian people." Meanwhile, 30 Iranian political activists, artists, and athletes (many of them pro-royalist) in the diaspora have [written a letter](#) to the new Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, urging him to continue his country's efforts to counter the Islamic Republic's activities, particularly its regional policies. They also called for support for the ongoing nationwide protests by the Iranian people.



## BEYOND the HEADLINES



Since the 1979 revolution, "regime change" has been a keyword not only among Iran's opposition groups but also for Islamic Republic's officials who tend to be obsessed by the fear of regime change from abroad or even from inside. Over the last four decades, the Islamic Republic's officials have routinely accused the West and particularly the U.S. as enemies who passionately pursue regime change in Iran. Since the [2018 protests in nearly 100 big and small cities](#), the new domestic wave calling for regime change has emerged. Protest slogans also included calls in favor of "Reza Shah," the late grandfather of the Crown Prince who is known for having reduced the power of the clergy. Ever since, exiled royalists claim that they are popular with protesters in Iran.

These renewed efforts by oppositions groups also comes on the backdrop of historically low voter turnout at Iran's most recent presidential elections as well as the ongoing "Campaign 1400" strikes by oil workers, which these groups try to capitalize on. However, it is unlikely that these efforts will be effective given (a) the strategic outlook of the Biden administration that is clearly not seeking "regime change" and (b) the disconnect between these above-mentioned groups and the activism in Iran itself.



# JCPOA TALKS ON HOLD



There is no sign yet when the seventh round of talks will start on the revival of the nuclear deal between Iran and global powers. [According to media reports](#), the Biden administration is beginning to grapple with the possibility that the deal may not be restored soon. Meanwhile, Iran is still trying to improve its “nuclear escalation” as a means of leverage to compel the U.S. to concede to a re-entry to the JCPOA in favor of Tehran’s terms. This week, the IAEA released a statement that its Director General Rafael Grossi [had informed](#) member states that Iran intended to use 20% enriched uranium to produce fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR). “In doing so, as part of a multi-stage process, Iran will also produce uranium metal-enriched up to 20% U-235”, it added. In reaction, the British, French, and German Foreign Ministers said [in a 6 July joint statement](#) that they had “grave concerns” about Tehran’s decision, stressing that “Iran has no credible civilian need for uranium metal R&D and production, which are a key step in the development of a nuclear weapon.” It added: “With its latest steps, Iran is threatening a successful outcome to the Vienna talks despite the progress achieved in six rounds of negotiations.” Despite such wording and warnings, a look at past experiences suggest that the EU is unlikely to increase the pressure on Tehran. On the Iranian part, Iran’s Ambassador to the Vienna-based international organizations Kazem Gharibabadi [stated](#) that “This measure, which will significantly improve the quality and quantity of radiopharmaceutical production, will make the Islamic Republic of Iran one of the leading countries in the field of nuclear technology.” Meanwhile, an unnamed Israeli official [contemplated](#): “Is the current treading water better or worse than a U.S. return to the deal, if and how Israel can influence the Biden administration, and what the current situation means for developing an Israeli military option?”

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## BEYOND the HEADLINES

Contrary to widespread, arguably overtly optimistic takes by many observers that Iran and the Biden administration would be rather quick to find a common denominator in reviving the nuclear deal according to a compliance-vs.-compliance scheme, the lapse of time has illustrated that there are indeed difficulties on both sides. Washington’s promise to seek a “longer and stronger” deal with Iran remains a key stumbling block Tehran is officially opposed to this idea, declaring that its missiles programme and its policies in the Middle East are the issues that the Islamic Republic is not willing to negotiate. Meanwhile, the White House knows that if they do not find a solution for such a “better” deal, they will have to face mounting criticism and pressure from the Republican Party as well as from U.S. allies such as Saudi Arabia and Israel. On its part, the Islamic Republic believes that the best way to dissuade the U.S. from seeking a “longer and stronger” agreement is the continuation of Iran’s “nuclear escalation” policy that is aimed at instilling alarmism in the West about an imminent Iranian nuclear bomb. Tehran’s recent decision to produce uranium metal enriched up to 20% should categorize in such a strategy, therefore force the international community to focus on Iran’s nuclear issue rather than the controversial non-nuclear issues.

Another key obstacle in reviving the JCPOA is whether Tehran will accept the reality that most probably the U.S. is not going to remove all Trump-era sanctions. This week, President Rouhani said in a rather realistic manner: “We won the economic war, the issue of sanctions remains, it is up to us. Part of it is in the hands of others, but we are the main part. This week we can decide and finish [it]. [Also] it can take months, which is another matter.” He also

urged Iran’s centres of power to reach a common point on the revival of the nuclear deal. One of the key challenges remains the latter’s rejection to implement bills that would satisfy international standards against money-laundering and terrorism financing (FATF) as this would force upon them transparency on their financial activities, domestically and regionally. Even in the case of U.S. sanctions removal, the latter theme will be a hurdle for Western entities to engage in business with Iran. Moreover, YJC, a news agency affiliated with Iran’s state TV, [observed](#) a change in Tehran’s behaviour: “the Rouhani administration has no longer the motivation to propagandize and benefit [from the revival of the JCPOA], so Araghchi, who represents Iran in the Vienna talks, has stood firm and will not back down from the demands of the West. The Americans did not expect the Iranian team to resist in this way.”



# CYBER- AND SABOTAGE OPERATIONS

The issue of cyberattacks and sabotage operations has appeared prominently in the headlines of Iran's news agencies. IRGC-affiliated *Fars News Agency* (FNA) [reported](#) that Iran's rail network has faced "unprecedented chaos due to a possible cyberattack." Trains were delayed or cancelled as ticket offices, the national railway's website and cargo services were disrupted. However, [FNA later removed its report](#) and instead quoted the spokesman of the state railway company, Sadegh Sekri, as saying "the disruption" did not cause any problems for train services. The railway company hence denied the disruption or the possibility of a cyberattack at the train stations, saying that there was a disruption in the commercial area of the railway company, the source of which would be unknown. FNA, which is arguably the most important news agency in Iran, also [reported](#) that three personnel of one of the most important power plants in the country, which is responsible for generating and

supplying electricity to large cities, were identified and arrested by monitoring agencies for collaborating with counter-revolutionary [i.e. opposition] groups.

A second incident also took place, with a [loud blast](#) being reported in the early hours of 10 July in the north of Tehran near the headquarters of the state broadcasting company. More importantly, the Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran is situated close to the location of the explosion. It is said that this organization collaborates with the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran. There was no additional information available. In the meanwhile, Hamidreza Goudarzi, the deputy security chief for Tehran Province, has said investigators were at the scene, looking into the extent and details of the explosion.



## BEYOND the HEADLINES

**“For the last 10 years, unfortunately, the influence of Mossad in different parts of the country is so great that all officials of the Islamic Republic should be concerned.”**

Over many years, and especially over the last year, amid mounting tension between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Israel, Tel Aviv has targeted several sites and persons that are related to Iran's nuclear programme. In addition, cyberattacks have been another instrument for Israel and even the U.S. to destroy Iran's nuclear infrastructure. Recently, Ali Younesi, Minister of Intelligence in the Khatami administration (2000–2005), [said](#): “For the last 10 years, unfortunately, the influence of Mossad in different parts of the country is so great that all officials of the Islamic Republic should be concerned. Neglect of Mossad has caused it to infiltrate and strike [against IRI]. It explicitly threatens the officials of the Islamic Republic.” Moreover, *Ensaf News*, a reformist news agency believed to be close to Iran's Ministry of Intelligence, published an [interview](#) with a former official of the Ministry of Intelligence who made some claims about the role of the U.S. and Israel, and the deficits of Iran's security agencies in the context of the killing of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, a senior official in the nuclear program of Iran and possibly its ballistic missile programme, at the hands of the Mossad inside of Iran. *Ensaf News* [removed](#) this report, saying it was due to the request of an agency of the Rouhani administration, i.e. probably the Ministry of Intelligence itself. A few months ago, former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad suggested the infiltration of Iran's intelligence agencies by the Mossad, which is not surprising given numerous successful Israeli operations inside of Iran in the recent past.

Given the ongoing “nuclear escalation” strategy of the Islamic Republic to pressure the Biden administration to pressure on Iran, such sabotage operations against Tehran will likely increase, which posed a tough test for Tehran's security and intelligence apparatus.





# COVID-19 VACCINATION EXTREMELY SLOW

“The delta variant of COVID-19 has now spread throughout the country, and has made the situation more unfavorable.”

The fifth wave of coronavirus has reached Iran, where more than 143 cities are now categorized as “red zones” due to the huge number of infections. However, state propaganda is still continuing unabated. Saeed Namaki, Minister of Health and Medical Education, whose performance is under serious criticism, has claimed to have been efficient and said he would be [the “general”](#) in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic. As in the last five months, officials keep promising to increase the speed of vaccination very soon. There are some reports that Iran started to vaccinate people with “made in Iran” vaccines. According to the media, Sistan and Baluchestan and Lorestan provinces have been provided with Iranian vaccines. While the authorities promised to increase vaccination to 500,000 doses per day, whereas on the first day of this plan (July 10), only 110,000 doses were injected. President Rouhani [remarked](#) on 10 July that “We have 60 million people over the age of 18, and 65 to 70 percent of that 60 million people need to be vaccinated, i.e. over 40–42 million people need to be vaccinated to break the chain [of the virus].” He also admitted that “the delta variant of COVID-19 has now spread throughout the country, and has made the situation more unfavorable.”

## BEYOND *the* HEADLINES

Amid the officials’ propaganda for the domestic vaccines whose efficiency is unclear, Iranian who can afford it have sought to obtain the vaccination with a trip to some regional countries, with long queues of Iranians having formed on the border with Armenia. Thousands of people are going to Armenia to be vaccinated as free vaccination is available for tourists. With the increasing number of Iranians who aim to receive vaccines from Armenia, this country adopted a new rule that tourists have to have a ten-day stay to be eligible to get vaccines. Increasing the costs for such trips is also a 10 million Rial fee (ca. \$40) that Iranians must pay before departure.

*Shargh*, the best-known reformist daily, has criticized Namaki, published a piece with the title “[Corona fantasies of Mr. Minister](#)” in which it writes: “While Iranian Minister of Health Saeed Namaki in all his speeches mentions Iran as a model where the whole world has been surprised by Iran’s management of the coronavirus, less than one percent of the population has been vaccinated and currently, Iran has entered the fifth coronavirus wave. For more than six months, we have been witnessing the unveiling of various types of coronavirus vaccines in the country on different days, while only five vaccines are being injected in the world, and now the number of unveilings [of vaccines] in Iran has reached six.” As a result, currently the best way for Iranians to get vaccinated is a trip to neighboring Armenia. However, the bulk of Iranians can simply not afford this path.





# 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

**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN  
STIFTUNG** Für die Freiheit.

Middle East and North Africa

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

عربستان سعودی  
SAUDI ARABIA

PREPARED BY M. L. DEWAN AND J. FAMOURI  
THE WORLD SOIL RESOURCES OFFICE  
LAND AND WATER DEVELOPMENT DIVISION - FAO

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