



DOMESTIC REFORMS AND REGIONAL POWER

IRAN 2017

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Iran 2017

Walter Posch

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Abstract: Iran is a key player at the heart of the most pressing questions of today's Middle East, including Syria, Iraq, and the Kurdish issue. This being said, Iran is not omnipotent, and Iranian decision makers are well aware of this. They are usually able to pragmatically weigh domestic against foreign policy engagements. On the domestic side, the Ruhani government seeks to boost economic development, to strengthen the rule of law in order to sideline domestic extremists, and to avoid red tape in public administration. On the regional level, Tehran will hold on to its current policies, carefully coordinating with Russia but relying on local Shiite groups, some of whom have been Tehran's partners for decades.



Introduction¹

The election of President Donald J. Trump came as an unwelcome surprise for the Iranian government and its strategic planners in Tehran. His threats to quit the JCPOA (“Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action”) nuclear agreement or to break it up were rejected outright by the Iranians. They also ignored being “put on notice” by former National Security Advisor General Flynn. Instead, Tehran is fulfilling its part of the agreement and calling on the international community to begin the gradual easing and reduction of the sanctions regime.

The Ruhani government is adamant that it must convert the hoped-for economic stimulus post-agreement into the political momentum to adapt and modernize Iran’s laws and regulations and to carry out broader reforms.

Economy

Apart from its obvious strategic and diplomatic importance, Iran also values the agreement for domestic and economic reasons. After all, the agreement aims to reconnect the Islamic Republic of Iran to the international markets and normalize trade, with the aim of subsequently attracting foreign investors to the country and therefore stabilizing the economy. The Ruhani government is adamant that it must convert the hoped-for economic stimulus post-agreement into the political momentum to adapt and modernize Iran’s laws and regulations and to carry out broader reforms. It is commonly understood in Iran that sanctions cannot be blamed for all the country’s economic problems, which are largely homemade. This explains why for some time now politicians and policy makers in Tehran have been openly debating the need to completely reform and restructure Iran’s old-fashioned and ailing banking system. Among other things, undercapitalization,

a lack of transparency in share ownership, and the transition to a modern electronic banking system have been identified as some of the most important problems weighing down the banking sector. The debate on the importance of reforming the sector has not been limited to expert and political circles; public pressure in favor of reform has also come from the population at large: a spate of recent canceled cheques placed many small and medium-sized enterprises under existential pressure and quickly became a political issue.² But above all, the government is also trying to attract foreign capital by creating legal certainties for investors within the framework of strengthening the rule of law.³

The rule of law and constraining extremists

But from Ruhani’s point of view, there are other non-economic considerations in adamantly pursuing legal reform. The lack of legal certainty affects not only foreign investors, but the whole of society. Ruhani laid down his socio-political targets in 2013 in a strategy paper called “The Citizens’ Rights Charter” (manshur-e hoquq-e shahrivandi).⁴ The text is less concerned with a large-scale idealistic draft for an “Islamic civil society” as some of its predecessors, but nonetheless securitizes civil rights (hoquq-e shahrivandi) and their application in the Islamic Republic. In terms of realpolitik, this does not necessarily mean a rolling back of Iran’s repressive security apparatus, but it puts a clear limitation on the powers of radical Islamist vigilantes, the so-called “Hezbollahis”.⁵ In many cases, their followers are also active in the security forces and are notorious for their arbitrariness, brutality and unpredictability. These mafia-like groups enjoy both open political backing and tacit

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support for their actions. They emerged in the early 1990s with the aim of counteracting the policies of former president Rafsanjani and his successor Khatami. Up until now, they have represented the most stubborn axis of resistance against Ruhani's moderate policies. On the one hand, their representatives in parliament blocked the government's work by, for example, campaigning against the ministers and allies of the President. On the other hand, their activists considered the cultural domain an ideological battleground and involved the state authorities and security forces in endless disputes over approved cultural activities such as poetry sessions, concerts, or cinema, which in turn forced Ruhani to intervene, thus wasting much time and political energy on ultimately fruitless ideological and theological debates.

He and his government put their hopes in a post-sanctions economic recovery of the country that in due course would make the Hezbollahis' clientalist networks unattractive, subsequently allowing him to divide their activists from the politicians and marginalize them in society.

The background of such activities is a serious one: the Islamic Republic has so far failed to come up with a working legal framework for the application of the Qur'anic principle of "ordering good and forbidding evil" (al-amr bi-l-ma'ruf va nahiy ani l-munkir, Sura 9:71, Article 8 of the Iranian Constitution). This has allowed the Hezbollahis and other self-proclaimed vigilantes to take the sacred law of the Qur'an into their own hands and act as "guardians of virtue" by punishing "sinners" and disrupting "sinful" events.⁶ The heyday of these activities was in the 1990s and 2000s, and apart from the often brutal consequences for their victims, they were aimed at put pressure on the government and forcing it to change its political course, or at least to

hand out economic benefits to their clients. In doing so, they did not hesitate to storm or disturb officially-approved and therefore legal meetings of reformist or reform-oriented clerics or to disrupt the public events held by reformist parties. Ruhani had already had problems with them when he was still Secretary-General of the High National Security Council, and as president he was repeatedly the victim of their heckling and abuse. The unpredictability of these groups, many of whom Ahmadinejad raised to important positions for the first time,⁷ is a basic weakness of the political system of Iran, which Ruhani, whose professional background is in the Iranian security apparatus, is vigorously trying to address. He and his government put their hopes in a post-sanctions economic recovery of the country that in due course would make the Hezbollahis' clientalist networks unattractive, subsequently allowing him to divide their activists from the politicians and marginalize them in society. But on the political and legal levels too, the reformers in Ruhani's camp are working against these extremists. Over the past months they have been preparing a bill which would explicitly criminalize the disruption of authorized political events and gatherings – much to the dismay of the Hezbollahis, who see spontaneity and unpredictability as their main strengths.⁸ Ruhani is taking the fight against these extremists seriously and has so far been successful despite setbacks, but sadly without having been able to solve the problem for good.

Politically-motivated eco-activism is still in its infancy, but in combination with minority questions and student protests, it may become a nationwide political force over the coming years.



Administrative Reform and Ecology

A widely-anticipated economic upswing should help the government implement the social reforms it promised during the election campaigns. In principle, these reforms are a question of when and how to carry out a series of modest but important steps towards liberalization. At the same time, the bloated administration is to be streamlined and made more efficient. Complaints about bureaucratic inefficiency and incompetent authorities are nothing new in Iran, and the president is well aware of this problem. After all, he authored two books on economic policy and on Iranian nuclear diplomacy in which he thoroughly examined the weaknesses of the Iranian administration.⁹

The strengthening of the provincial administrations has played a central role in Ruhani's reform agenda

What is new and has increasingly gained importance in recent years are ecological questions. Air pollution in Tehran and in other cities, water shortages due to improper and irresponsible water management, man-made desertification in addition to drought, and industrial contamination of fertile soil – in short, the exploitation of nature – have highlighted the need for efficient environmental protection.¹⁰ As these facts can no longer be denied, the Iranian public is demanding more sincerity from its political leadership on this issue. The government, whilst fully cognizant of the problem, appears relatively clueless about how to tackle these challenges.¹¹ Hence, there is no cohesive environmental protection policy yet, and provincial administrations seem to be as incapable of taking the necessary measures as the central government.

The combination of environmental aspects with regional problems in provinces inhabited by ethnic minorities, such as the ecological

collapse and drying up of Lake Urmiya in West Azerbaijan, the flood catastrophe in Baluchistan¹² or the life-threatening levels of air pollution in Khuzestan, have the potential to be politically explosive.¹³ Politically-motivated eco-activism is still in its infancy, but in combination with minority questions and student protests, it may become a nationwide political force over the coming years. It is too early to tell how Iran's environmental institutions¹⁴ will develop: as of now, one has to conclude that the government is still struggling to find the right balance between ecology and the economy.

Reforming the Provinces

In the provinces, the government's attempts to support the local economy are linked to administrative reform. The strengthening of the provincial administrations has played a central role in Ruhani's reform agenda: state governors (ostândâr) are to be given more decision-making powers in the economic sphere and the number of officials working in local administrations shall be increased.¹⁵ In doing so, the government hopes to achieve two goals: first, to strengthen the economy in the provinces. By simplifying decision-making processes by way of devolution, the provincial administrations will have more powers of economic decision-making and will therefore be able to act autonomously from the Tehran ministries and avoid extra bureaucratic procedures. But secondly, the government also hopes to meet the demands of Iranian ethnic groups, which are the majority in the delicate border regions. For example, in the province of Kordestan the Kurdish language has been taught for a year now.¹⁶ This was in a way a reaction to Kurdish nationalism and the improvement of the position of the Kurdish language in Turkey: both developments served as an inspiration for Iranian Kurds which Tehran could not ignore.¹⁷ The demands for mother tongue instruction on behalf of Turkish-speaking Azerbaijanis were also taken into account.¹⁸



Yet not much is known about the situation concerning other local languages in Iran, such as Arabic and Baluchi. It remains to be seen whether Kordestan remains an exception or the beginning of a new chapter in Iranian policy towards its ethnic groups (qoumiyat).¹⁹

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Elections in 2017

Ruhani's domestic and economic successes have so far been rather meager. This may potentially have a negative impact on the presidential election in May 2017. Nevertheless, most observers are betting on his re-election. This is because, on the one hand, he is the ideal compromise figure for the political elites, since he does not belong to either the reformist, the principle-ist or the conservative camp. However, he has always enjoyed the support of some of the economically-oriented conservative modernizers, who were once led by his late mentor, Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Bahramani-Rafsanjani, and the most important representative of this political current, Ali Akbar Nateq-Nuri, has already spoken out in his favor. He also enjoys the support of the reformist camp, which obviously does not want to field a candidate against him.²⁰ Needless to say, the chaos among the principalists who are trying to reorganize themselves into the "People's Front of the Forces of the Islamic Revolution" (JAMNA jabhe-ye mardomi-ye niruhâ-ye enghelâb-e eslâmi) has benefited him further, since JAMNA has encountered serious problems during the preparation of their candidate lists for their primaries.²¹ In terms of content, their positions are

completely unclear and personal rivalries set the tone. In this respect, Ruhani has a good chance of becoming the next president of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Judging from the Iranian experience, however, one has to be prepared for surprises. For one, widespread frustration resulting in low voter turnout would affect the reformists more than other groups. Or the American side using the nuclear issue during the electoral campaign in a way that changes the political dynamics in the country. Either one of these could create a political windfall for outside candidates and result in an unexpected outcome similar to the 2005 elections, provided that this alternative candidate is supported by important political networks, although there are currently no indications of this. However, one politician must not be underestimated: Dr. Mahmud Ahmadinejad, the only true populist in the Islamic Republic of Iran, whom Supreme Leader Khamenei has personally suggested should refrain from becoming a candidate. Ahmadinejad has repeatedly denied he would make a bid for the presidency²² (this time at least) but is instead supporting Hamid Baqai, an "independent" candidate who is one of his old confidants. The former president also regularly tours the provinces where he has his followers. But there is evidence that he has not retired from politics in his letter to President Trump, whose assessment of the American media he shares.²³ Ahmadinejad therefore remains a wild card in the political game.

The implementation of the JCPOA does not only affect domestic and economic policy, but also foreign policy. No-one expects the agreement to collapse, or that Iran will leave the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT). However, a serious crisis between the U.S. and Iran, perhaps even in the first half of the year, seems likely to most observers.



The U.S. may officially honor the international consensus over the Iranian nuclear program, they will at the same time increase the pressure on Tehran. The main bone of contention is Iran's regional policy, which has not only been criticized in Washington.

A Sect-Based Regional Policy

The implementation of the JCPOA does not only affect domestic and economic policy, but also foreign policy. No-one expects the agreement to collapse, or that Iran will leave the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT). However, a serious crisis between the U.S. and Iran, perhaps even in the first half of the year, seems likely to most observers. Because, although the U.S. may officially honor the international consensus over the Iranian nuclear program, they will at the same time increase the pressure on Tehran. The main bone of contention is Iran's regional policy, which has not only been criticized in Washington.

From the Iranian point of view, not much is left of the so-called "axis of resistance"

From the Iranian point of view, not much is left of the so-called "axis of resistance", Tehran's main ideological project, which predicted the downfall of all pro-Western regimes and the disappearance of Israel. Once the Palestinian Hamas left the "axis", Tehran could no longer manipulate the Palestinian issue to its strategic advantage.²⁴ Yet, what remained is essentially a focus on Syria and Iraq, the Kurdish question, and sect-based conflicts. This is partly due to the Saudis' successful reinterpretation of the axis as a "Shia crescent" and partly it is the result of conflicts in Iraq and Syria. Confessionalization – that is, viewing all conflicts through the lenses of confessional adherence – has deprived the Iranians of their pan-Islamic

legitimacy in a region that has always viewed them as Persian and Shiite outsiders. Tehran also observes with increasing concern how Iranian Sunnis are joining extremist groups such as ISIS, fearing that they will become a domestic security threat after their return.

In the case of Syria one can observe a clear shift from ideology towards national interests.

Syria

Hence, in the case of Syria one can observe a clear shift from ideology towards national interests. At the beginning of the crisis, support for the regime was justified ideologically and Syria was viewed as a front-line state against Israel and the "global arrogance", i.e. the U.S.-dominated world order. Military support mainly consisted of assistance with self-sufficiency and was, and is, handled through the "Qods" unit of the Revolutionary Guards.²⁵ Qods served in one function as military adviser to regime forces, although they were also involved in battles. On the other hand, they fulfilled their main task: namely, the establishment of ideologically-reliable local revolutionary Islamist cells, soon to be transformed into militias. After the beginning of the crisis, Iran started to call Lebanese Hezbollah into the Syrian theatre and to recruit Shiite Afghans and Iraqis, a fact that inevitably intensified the confessionalization of the conflict. After the triumph of ISIS in 2014, the reasons for the Syrian intervention changed. Tehran now emphasized that it was more sensible to fight ISIS far from the Iranian border using proxies rather than regular troops. The heavy losses in the fight against ISIS exhausted the pool of volunteers for its three Shiite militias (Fatehin, Zeynabiyun and Fatemiyun).²⁶ How dramatically the military situation deteriorated can be seen in the fact that, in 2016, units of the regular Iranian army were transferred to Syria; namely, parts of the



prestigious 65th Airborne Brigade, whose tradition goes back to the U.S. Green Berets.²⁷

A calming of the situation in Syria would not immediately change the situation in Iraq.

However, Tehran does not rely solely on military might in its Syrian policy, but also coordinates with Russia. This concerns military operations as well as international politics, as the Iranian participation in the Astana and Geneva talks has shown. Obviously Moscow and Tehran are trying, in coordination with the government in Damascus and with the occasional involvement of Turkey, to establish a stable ceasefire along the present front lines in order to stabilize Syria. The UN under Staffan de Mistura had already tried something similar. If, contrary to expectations, Tehran and Moscow actually succeed in silencing Syrian weapons permanently in the course of the coming year, this would be an important political success for both states. Yet, a calming of the situation in Syria would not immediately change the situation in Iraq.

In addition to the struggle against ISIS, Shi'ite and Kurdish forces are stubbornly struggling over the so-called "contested areas", a region claimed by the Kurds as part of Kurdistan, the status of which has not yet been settled.

Iraq

In war-torn Iraq, Iran benefits from its long-established Shiite networks, the most important of them being the "Badr" organizations.²⁸ Badr has been a major force behind the build-up of the predominantly Shiite "people's mobilization" (hashd al-sha'bi), whose legal status is now secured by a parliamentary decision. This unit is

currently used in Mosul and other regions of the country and has become a principle component of the Iraqi security apparatus. Regarding military operations against ISIS in Iraq, one has to see how Tehran is involved in all major operations involving the united forces of the Iraqi army, the mobilization of the people, and the Kurdish Peshmerga at leadership levels. In addition to the struggle against ISIS, Shi'ite and Kurdish forces are stubbornly struggling over the so-called "contested areas", a region claimed by the Kurds as part of Kurdistan, the status of which has not yet been settled. Thus, Shia forces prevented a bridging of Kurdish forces between Tel Afar and the Sinjar Mountains, and they made it clear that they saw the controversial city of Kirkuk as being part of the Arab sphere of influence. In the medium term, Tehran will try to prevent open civil war between the Kurds and Arab Shiites and thus do their best to mediate. At the same time, however, the Iranians have no interest in making the neighbor so strong as to be able to threaten Iran, as happened under Saddam Hussein.

Ruhani is trying to to unite Rafsanjani's liberal economic approach with the human and civil rights approach of Khatami and to focus on domestic institutional reform.

Finally, the role of Americans in Iraq remains a problem for Tehran. Tehran is benefiting for the time being from the American struggle against ISIS and American support for the Iraqi army. On the other hand, Iranians hope the U.S. will leave the country in the medium term. The problem for Tehran could come from pro-Iranian militant Shiites demobilized from the peoples mobilization forces and who, after the victory over ISIS, might be foolish enough to confront the Americans. The same is true of the Persian Gulf, should the Revolutionary Guards try to



provoke the U.S. 5th fleet again. The present American president will prove to be much less lenient towards Iran and will likely demand immediate satisfaction.

In regional policy, Iran's claims have become more modest and are essentially confined to the task of pacification in Syria and Iraq.

Conclusion

Ruhani is trying to to unite Rafsanjani's liberal economic approach with the human and civil rights approach of Khatami and to focus on domestic institutional reform. Complaints about administrative incompetence are the order of the day in Iran: in particular, omnipresent corruption, the ideologization of the administrative apparatus, continual state monitoring, the repressive security apparatus, and the steadily increasing influence of the revolutionary guards in the economy. These tarnish the regime's standing within society. Backed by the Supreme Leader, Ruhani was able to make some important steps towards the implementation of the rule of law. This was the only way he could probably have dealt with the influence of the revolutionary guards on daily politics (but not on the economy!).

The main focus of Iranian policy, however, remains the implementation of the JCPOA, which is necessary for financing reform. Hence, these will have an impact on the likelihood that Ruhani is re-elected.

In regional policy, Iran's claims have become more modest and are essentially confined to the task of pacification in Syria and Iraq. The potential for escalation with the U.S. has increased, both at the diplomatic level

and in the region, especially in Iraq and the Persian Gulf. The main focus of Iranian policy, however, remains the implementation of the JCPOA, which is necessary for financing reform. Hence, these will have an impact on the likelihood that Ruhani is re-elected.

Thus, the Islamic Republic of Iran will continue its domestic reform process and act cautiously on the international scene, but will nevertheless show strength and confidently attempt to shape the region.



Endnotes:

- 1- This piece was first published by “Bosch Megatrends 7.0”
- 2- “Torfand-e bânkhâ ke be qofl shodan-e manâbe’ anjâmîd,” (Banking tricks that resulted in the close-down of financial resources) *Tâbnâk*, 7 Esfand 1395/25 February 2017.
- 3- Seyyede Fâteme She’âr, “Amniyat-e sarmâye-gozâri bâ eslâh-e qavânin-e bânki,” (Investment security due to reform of banking legislation) *Eqtesâd-e Irâni*, 9 Azar 1395/29 November 2016.
- 4- Cf. “New Iranian Citizens’ Rights’ Charter met with mixed reviews,” *Al-Monitor*, 6 December 2013; For a revised version of the charter see “Manshur-e Hoquq-e Shahrivandi”, Azar 1395/ November 2016 at <<http://rouhani.ir/files/CitizensRights.pdf>>
- 5- On these groups and on the background of Iran’s radical Islamists see Walter Posch, „Islamistische Gewalt in der Islamischen Republik Iran,“ in Jasmina Rupp, *Der (Alb) Traum vom Kalifat, Vienna – Cologne – Weimar 2016*, pp. 211-236.
- 6- Posch, „Islamische Gewalt,“ pp. 218 and 226f..
- 7- On Ahmadinejad’s relationship with radical groups see Walter Posch, „The End of a Beautiful Friendship? Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and the Principalists,“ in: Clement Therme, Houchang E. Chehabi, Farhad Khosrokhavar (eds), *Iran and the Challenges of the Twenty –First Century. Essays in Honour of Mohammad-Reza Djalili*, Costa Mesa 2013, pp. 50-78.
- 8- “Sadsâzi-ye Eslâh-Talabân dar barâbar-e khodsarhâ,” (Reformist containment against vigilantes) *Farâru*, 28 Bahman 1395/16 February 2017.
- 9- These are Hasan Ruhani, *Amniyat-e melli va Diplomâsi-ye Hastei*, (National Security and Nuclear Diplomacy) Tehran 1390/2011 and *Amniyat-e Melli va Nezâm-e Eqtesâdi-ye Irân*, (National Security and the Economic System of Iran) Tehran 1389/2010; see the following review Farideh Farhi, “Amniyat-e

melli va Diplomasi-ye Hastei,” *Iranian Studies*, 47.2.2014, pp. 360-364.

10- The dramatic ecological situation in the country has recently gained much scholarly attention among others on behalf of *Iranian Studies*, a flagship journal on Iran affairs, see Kaveh Madani, Amir Aghakouchak, Ali Mirchi, “Iran’s socio-economic drought: Challenges of a Water-Bankrupt Nation,” *Iranian Studies*, 49.6.2016, pp. 997-1016; Farhad Yazdandoost, “Dams, Drought and Water Shortage in Today’s Iran,” *Iranian Studies*, 49.6.2016, pp. 1017-1028; Vahid Hosseini, Hossein Shahbazi, “Urban Air Pollution in Iran,” *Iranian Studies*, 49.6.2017, pp. 1029-1046.,

11- See the short point Ruhani made on the environment in one of his recent speeches: “And in the last months we also had some accidents in the provinces, such as environmental problems and the sandstorms which as a consequence brought other problems to bear. But the people are wise, patient and capable and officials too are eager to solve problems; the day before yesterday I said in Ahvâz that problems emerging from the last 40-50 years cannot be solved in one or two years.” See “Heshdâr-hâ-ye entekhâbâti-e Ruhâni [...]” (Electoral warnings of Ruhani) *Alef*, 7 Esfand 1395/25 February 2017.

12- “Seyl dar Sistân va Baluchestân foru-kesh kard” (Floods in Sistan and Baluchestan got stronger) *Tâbnâk*, 9. Bahman 1395/28 January 2017.

13- “Hall-e moshkel-e âludegi-ye havâ-ye Khuzistân ‘azm-e melli va beyno l-melali mi-khvâhad,” (Solving air pollution in Khuzistan must be a national and international endeavor) *Khouznews*, 30 Dey 1395/19 January 2017.

14- See for instance Iran’s environment agency *Sâzemân-e Hefâzat-e mohit-e zist* <www.doe.ir>

15- On this debate see for instance „Touse’e az ostandârihâ shoru’ mi shaved?” (Will development be generated by the governorates?) *Hamshahri Mâh*, 115/1392/2014,



p. 24f.

16- See my forthcoming chapter on „Fellow Arians and Muslim Brothers: Iranian Narratives on the Kurds,” in Gareth Stansfield and Mohammed Shareef (eds), *The Kurdish Question Revisited*, London 2017.

17- On Erbil’s potential influence on Iran’s Kurdish nationalism see Hamid Bozhmehrani and Mohammad Pour-Eslami, “Tahdidhâ-ye narm-e khodmokhtâri-ye eqlim-e Kordestân-e ‘Erâq va ta’sir-e ân bar Kordhâ-ye Irân,” (Soft Security Threats from the autonomous Kurdistan region and its influence on the Iranian Kurds) *Jâmeshenâsi-ye Jehân-e Eslâm*, 2/1, pp. 87-110 and the following scholarly debate between Ja’afar Haqq-Panâh and Mohammed Sadiq Ahmed (“Cigerxwun”): “Bar-rasi-ye jâme-e shenâsi va monâsebât-e manteqei-ye Kodestân-e ‘Erâq: houze-ye tamadonni-ye moshtarak-e Irâni-Kordi,” (Sociological and regional-political inquiry on Iraqî Kurdistan: the common cultural Irano-Kurdish sphere,) *Hamshahri Diplomâtik*, 79 1392/2014, pp. 78-87; see also “Zabân-e Kordi dar madâres-e Torkiye tadrîs mi-shavad,” (The Kurdish language will be taught in schools in Turkey) *‘Asr-e Irân*, 22 Khordâd 1391/12 June 2012.

18- “Âmuzesh-e zabânâ-ye Kordi va Torki dar dânesghâhâ-ye keshvar,” (University-level language instruction for Kurdish and Turkish) *‘Asr-e Irân*, 24 Mordâd 1395/22 July 2016..

19- The standard text on Iranian ethnicities/qoumiyat is Seyyed Reza Salehi-Amiri, *Modiriyat-e Monâze’eât-e qoumi dar Irân*, (The management of ethnic disputes in Iran) Tehran 1390/2012..

20- “7 tousih-e Nâteq be Eslâh-talabân,” (7 Advices of Nâteq for the Reformists) *Sharq*, 12 Bahman 1395/31 January 2017.

21- “Gomanezani darbâre-ye kâandidâ-ye niruhâ-ye enqelâb dar entekhâbât-e riyâsat-jomhuri – khalâf va vâqe’ ast” (Rumours about the candidates of the Forces of the Revolution are both right and wrong) *Tâbnâk*, 5 Esfand 1395/23 February 2013; “Panj nokte monhaser be-fard majma’-e

‘omumi-ye jabhe-ye mardomi-ye niruhâ-ye enqelâb,” (five exclusive points at the general assembly of the Peoples’ Front of the Forces of the Revolution) *Tâbnâk*, 6 Esfand 1395/23 February 2017.

22- “Ettelâ’iye-ye Ahmadinezhâd dar ertebât bâ entekhâbât-e riyâsat-jomhuri” (Declaration of Ahmadinejad concerning the presidential elections), *Alef*, 23 Bahman 1395/11 February 2017.

23- “Doktor Ahmadinezhâd be Terâmp nâme nevesht: matn-e kâmel-e fârsi va englizi,” (Dr. Ahmadinejad wrote a letter to Trump: full text in Persian and English) *Doulat-e Bahâr*, 8 Esfand 1395/26 February 2017.

24- Ebrahim Motaqqi, “Mo’âdele-ye Amniyat, Molâhezât-e râhbordi-ye Irân va jabhe-ye moâvemat dar nomâze’ât-e manteqei” (Security Balancing: strategic observations on Iran and the resistance front within the context of regional disputes,) *Hamshahri Diplomâtik*, 850 Winter 1394/2015, pp. 28- 31; Walter Posch, *The third World, Global Islam and Pragmatism. The Making of Iranian Foreign Policy*, SWP Berlin 2013, p. 27-29..

25- “E’terâf-e farmândeh-e sepâh beh hozur-e Niru-ye Qods dar Suriye va tahdid-e Esrâil,” (Comments of Guards’ Commander regarding the presence of the Qods Force in Syria and the Israeli threat) *Entkehâb*, 27 Shahrivar 1391/16. September 2012.

26- “Zeynebiyun, Fatemiyun va Fatehin mo’âdelâtrâ bar-ham zاده-and,” (Zeynebiyun, Fatemiy and Fatehin have changed the equation) *Mashraq*, 18 Âzar 1395/8 December 2016.

27- Abbas Qaidari, “Who sent Iranian Green Berets to Syria?” *Al-Monitor*, 28. April 2016.

28- The development of Badr has been very well researched. See “Sepâh-e Badr chegune shekl gereft?” (How did Badr come into being?) *Young Journalists Club*, 17 Dey 1393/7 January 2017.



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ABOUT ALSHARQ FORUM

The Sharq Forum is an independent international network whose mission is to undertake impartial research and develop long-term strategies to ensure the political development, social justice and economic prosperity of the people of Al-Sharq. The Forum does this through promoting the ideals of democratic participation, an informed citizenry, multi-stakeholder dialogue, social justice, and public-spirited research.

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DOMESTIC REFORMS AND REGIONAL POWER

IRAN 2017

Iran is a key player at the heart of the most pressing questions of today's Middle East, including Syria, Iraq, and the Kurdish issue. This being said, Iran is not omnipotent, and Iranian decision makers are well aware of this. They are usually able to pragmatically weigh domestic against foreign policy engagements. On the domestic side, the Ruhani government seeks to boost economic development, to strengthen the rule of law in order to sideline domestic extremists, and to avoid red tape in public administration. On the regional level, Tehran will hold on to its current policies, carefully coordinating with Russia but relying on local Shiite groups, some of whom have been Tehran's partners for decades.



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