

Iran (March 2, 2021)

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1a)

U.S. Airstrikes in Syria Target Iran-Backed Militias That Rocketed American Troops in Iraq

President Biden ordered retaliatory strikes against the militias whose attacks in Erbil this month killed one civilian contractor and wounded a U.S. service member.

By Helene Cooper and Eric Schmitt

February 26, 2021

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/25/us/politics/biden-syria-airstrike-iran.html>

„The United States on Thursday carried out airstrikes in eastern Syria against buildings belonging to what the Pentagon said were Iran-backed militias responsible for recent attacks against American and allied personnel in Iraq. President Biden authorized the strikes in response to the rocketing in Iraq and to continuing threats to American and coalition personnel there, said John F. Kirby, the Pentagon press secretary, who spoke with reporters traveling with Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III in California. A rocket attack on Feb. 15 on the airport in Erbil, in northern Iraq, killed a Filipino contractor with the American-led military coalition and wounded six others, including a Louisiana National Guard soldier and four American contractors. [...]“

1b)

Biden's Warning to Iran and Its Proxies: Implications of the Syria Strike

By Michael Knights

The Washington Institute for New East Policy

February 26, 2021

<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/bidens-warning-iran-and-its-proxies-implications-syria-strike>

„The administration's early recourse to armed force may have surprised Tehran, but the proxy tests will continue, suggesting the need for sustained U.S. intelligence support and multilateral engagement with partners. In the early hours of February 26, U.S. aircraft bombed an east Syrian base used by Iran-backed Iraqi militias. The strike was a response to the February 15 rocket attack on Erbil International Airport, where the U.S.-led coalition has a major base. Underlining the U.S. determination that Iran's militia proxies undertook the Erbil attack, the Syria strike followed a U.S. complaint and warning sent to the Iranian government via backchannels. Although exact damage assessment is yet to be revealed, this first use of force by President Biden shows that the United States will use the military instrument to restore deterrence (however temporarily) even as it prepares for nuclear talks with Tehran. [...]“

1c)

The US brings Israel into CENTCOM

The Pentagon's decision last month to relocate Israel to the U.S. military's Central Command area of responsibility is a milestone development that could boost deterrence of Iran.

By Yaakov Lappin

February 22, 2021

<https://www.jns.org/the-us-brings-israel-into-centcom/>

„Though the move will take some time to go into effect, the Pentagon’s recent decision to relocate Israel to the area of responsibility (AOR) of the U.S. military’s Central Command (CENTCOM, which operates in the Middle East) is a direct operational reflection of the Abraham Accords, in which Israel normalized relations with the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, with Saudi support. [...]“

1d)

Israeli Cargo Ship Struck In Oman Gulf After US Air Strike

The F-15 airstrike, reported to have killed 17 people, drew an initial muted response from Iranian officials. However, a ship owned by an Israeli company was damaged later in the day while sailing in the Gulf of Oman.

By Arie Egozi

February 26, 2021

<https://breakingdefense.com/2021/02/israeli-cargo-ship-struck-in-oman-gulf-after-us-air-strike/>

1e)

Explosion hits Israeli-owned cargo ship in Gulf of Oman, no injuries

Maritime intelligence firm says blast likely stemmed from ‘asymmetric activity by Iranian military’; ship identified as MV Helios Ray owned by Israeli shipping magnate Rami Ungar

By Jon Gambrell and Isabel Debre

February 26, 2021

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/explosion-hits-israeli-owned-cargo-ship-in-gulf-of-oman-no-injuries/>

1f)

After U.S. Attack In Syrian Iran Demonstrates Its Escalation Dominance

By Moon of Alabama

February 26, 2021

<https://www.moonofalabama.org/2021/02/after-us-attack-in-syrian-iran-demonstrates-its-escalation-dominance-.html>

„Last night the U.S. escalated the situation in Iraq by bombing Iraqi government security forces at the Iraqi-Syrian border station near Abu-Kamal/Al-Qaim. One Iraqi soldier, a Sunni, was killed. Other sources claim that as many as 22 were killed. [...]“

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2a)

Why Qatar Wants to Facilitate a US-Iran Breakthrough

By Mehran Haghirian

February 17, 2021

<https://www.bourseandbazaar.com/articles/2021/2/17/why-qatar-wants-to-facilitate-a-us-iran-breakthrough>

„On February 15, Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, the foreign minister of Qatar, travelled to Tehran in the latest instance of Doha's efforts to act as a facilitator for the resolution of international conflicts. Al Thani delivered a letter from the Emir of Qatar to Iran's President, Hassan Rouhani. Beyond matters related to bilateral issues, the contents of the letter likely included Qatar's offer to facilitate dialogue between Iran and the United States on issues related to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). This trip was not the first time Qatar has attempted to play a role in resolving the conflict between Tehran and Washington. Just over a year ago, a day after the assassination of Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani, the Qatari foreign minister made an unannounced trip to Tehran to deescalate tensions. Shortly afterward, Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani's made his first official visit to Iran. [...]“

2b)

Iran and the International Arena: Challenges and Opportunities

By Sima Shine

Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), Tel Aviv University

February 11, 2021

<https://www.inss.org.il/publication/iran-and-the-international-arena-challenges-and-opportunities/>

https://www.inss.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/IranMonograph_e.pdf

„This monograph is a special collection of articles by experts from Europe, the United States and Israel, who have been cooperating in an inter-think tank working group under the auspices of the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) Israel. All articles have a focus on the Iranian issue from different perspectives. The introductory article is written by myself as one of the main conveners of the international working group, and the monograph editor.“

2c)

Diplomacy With Iran: Opportunities and Risks for the UAE

As tensions with Iran are expected to ease under the Biden administration, the UAE's economic ties and legacy relations position it to potentially play a pivotal role in Gulf outreach to Tehran.

By Banafsheh Keynoush

The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (AGSIW)

February 26, 2021

<https://agsiw.org/diplomacy-with-iran-opportunities-and-risks-for-the-uae/>

„[...] Despite ongoing tensions with Iran, the UAE has maintained a limited degree of engagement. How these relations develop in the future will, to a significant extent, be shaped by the trajectory of the likely upcoming negotiations between Iran and the United States, along with the Europeans. For now, what is

clear is that bilateral trade, diplomatic ties, and humanitarian efforts offer a supportive backdrop for the major nuclear diplomacy and related efforts to come.“

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3a)

Time Not Ripe for Unofficial Meeting Proposed by EU's Borrell: Spokesman

February 28, 2021

<https://en.mfa.ir/portal/NewsView/630105>

„[...] In a statement on Sunday, Khatibzadeh said, “In view of the recent stances and measures taken by the United States and the three European countries, the Islamic Republic of Iran believes this is not a good time for holding an unofficial meeting on the accord as proposed by the EU foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell.” “There has been no change in the United States' stances and behaviour, and the Biden administration has not only failed to abandon Trump's failed policy of maximum pressure, but has also failed to declare its commitment to the implementation of all its obligations under the JCPOA and the UN Security Council Resolution 2231.” [...]“

3b)

Return to the Nuclear Agreement with Iran: Will China Facilitate United States Measures?

Since Biden's victory, China has worked to help Washington return to the nuclear agreement with Iran, from a proposal to convene an international conference to contacts with senior figures in the administration. Why is China choosing to take an active part on this issue, and how do Israel's interests come into play – if at all?

By Eyal Propper

The Institute for National Security Studies (Tel Aviv University)

February 23, 2021

<https://www.inss.org.il/publication/china-and-the-jcpoa/>

„China has renewed its proposal to convene an international meeting of all parties to the nuclear deal with Iran (JCPOA), including the United States, with the goal of discussing the US return to the agreement. On the eve of the first telephone conversation between the US and Chinese Presidents (February 11, 2021), the special US Envoy for Iran issue and the Chinese Deputy Foreign Minister considered ways to coordinate moves on the JCPOA. Active mediation on the Iranian nuclear issue may be part of a broader Chinese policy aimed at promoting cooperation with the Biden administration on essential issues to the United States in exchange for preservation of China's core interests, and as part of its position as a permanent member of the Security Council. China presumes that Israel will continue to oppose an agreement with Iran and will not support Beijing's moves. Israel, for its part, should closely monitor China's moves, coordinate its policies with the United States and the Gulf states, and seek to promote dialogue at the level of the Chinese leadership, while strengthening direct contact with senior diplomats dealing with the Iranian issue. [...]“

3c)

Iran says not interested in escalation of tensions with US

By Press TV

February 28, 2021

<https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2021/02/28/646217/Iran-US-JCPOA-takht-ravanchi-sanctions>

„Iran’s ambassador to the United Nations says Tehran is not interested in escalation of tensions with the United States, and unlike Washington, the Islamic Republic has no interest in making provocative moves. Majid Takht-Ravanchi said the Islamic Republic of Iran has proved that it is not interested in escalation of tension, even during the tenure of the Trump administration that started the tension and provocative moves. [...]“

3d)

Fool me once: How Tehran views the Iran nuclear deal

Europe and the US should focus their efforts on swiftly returning to the original nuclear agreement with Iran rather than holding out for the unlikely prospect of better terms

By Ali Reza Eshraghi

The European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)

February 25, 2021

<https://ecfr.eu/article/fool-me-once-how-tehran-views-the-iran-nuclear-deal/>

„In Tehran, the initial hopes for what the Biden administration could offer Iran – particularly in terms of a revived economy – are fading. Iranian leaders recognise that, although the new president in the White House says he wants to rejoin the 2015 nuclear deal, there has been little tangible shift away from the Trump-era maximum pressure campaign against Iran. While there is still a possibility that the agreement will be revived, it increasingly appears to Tehran that the process will be a marathon and not a sprint. [...]“

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4a)

Joint statement by the Vice-President of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Head of the AEOI and the Director General of the IAEA

February 21, 2021

<https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/pressreleases/joint-statement-by-the-vice-president-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-and-head-of-the-aeoi-and-the-director-general-of-the-iaea>

„[...] The AEOI informed the IAEA that in order to comply with the act passed by the Parliament of the Islamic Republic of Iran called "Strategic Action Plan to Lift Sanctions and Protect Iranian Nation’s Interests" (The "Law") Iran will stop the implementation of the voluntary measures as envisaged in the JCPOA, as of 23 February 2021. In view of the above and in order for the Agency to continue its verification and monitoring activities, the AEOI and the IAEA agreed: 1. That Iran continues to implement fully and without limitation its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA as before. 2. To a temporary bilateral technical understanding, compatible with the Law, whereby the IAEA will continue with its necessary verification and monitoring activities for up to 3 months (as per technical annex). 3. To keep the technical understanding under regular review to ensure it continues to achieve its purposes.“

4b)

Iran and IAEA reach 'temporary' agreement to maintain nuclear surveillance

By Euronews with AP

February 22, 2021

<https://www.euronews.com/2021/02/21/un-nuclear-chief-in-iran-ahead-of-sanctions-deadline>

„The head of the United Nations' nuclear watchdog met on Sunday with Iranian officials in a bid to preserve his inspectors' ability to monitor Tehran's atomic programme. It came as Iranian authorities said they planned to cut off surveillance cameras at the sites. Rafael Grossi's arrival in Tehran came against a backdrop of Iran trying to pressure Europe and the new Biden administration into returning to the 2015 nuclear deal, which former president Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from in 2018. Grossi told reporters after the meeting that investigators will still be able to monitor Tehran's work for up to three months, but with less access than before. [...]“

4c)

Head of Atomic Energy Organization of Iran: We will respond if IAEA Board adopts negative resolution

By Press TV

February 28, 2021

<https://www.presstv.com/Detail/2021/02/28/646257/Iran-IAEA-negative-resolution>

„Tehran will respond appropriately in case the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) issues a resolution against Iran for suspending the implementation of the Additional Protocol that allowed the IAEA to carry out short-notice inspections, says the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI). [...]“

4d)

Nuclear weapons forbidden: Increasing uranium enrichment based on country's needs

February 22, 2021

<https://english.khamenei.ir/news/8396/Nuclear-weapons-forbidden-Increasing-uranium-enrichment-based>

„The following is the full text of the speech delivered on February 22, 2021, by Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, in a meeting with the chairman and members of the Assembly of Experts. The meeting was held at the end of the eighth session of the Assembly. [...]“

4e)

Iran Slams Israel for Recent Activity at the 'Region's Only Nuclear Bomb Factory'

New imagery raises questions about activities at the Negev Nuclear Research Center.

By Andrea Germanos

February 25, 2021

<https://www.commondreams.org/news/2021/02/25/iran-slams-israel-recent-activity-regions-only-nuclear-bomb-factory>

„[...] In a Saturday tweet sharing *The Guardian's* reporting on the Dimona activity, Zarif tagged President Joe Biden, the International Atomic Energy Agency, U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson, French President Emmanuel Macron, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel and wrote, "Israel is expanding Dimona, the region's only nuclear bomb factory." "Gravely concerned? Concerned? A little? Care to comment? I thought so," tweeted Zarif. Further comment from Iran came Wednesday from Esmaeil Baghaei Hamaneh, Iran's ambassador to the U.N. According to state-owned Press TV, Hamaneh said that Israel's attempts to pursue nuclear weapons posed a threat to regional and international peace. He said that "the United States and its Western allies should be held responsible for failure of the efforts to establish a Middle East free of weapons of mass destruction given their support for the Tel Aviv regime and equipping it with nuclear arms." [...]"

4f)

The IAEA's Latest Iran NPT Safeguards Report: Tehran Continues to Stonewall Inspectors

By David Albright, Sarah Burkhard, and Andrea Stricker

The Institute for Science and International Security

February 25, 2021

<https://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/the-iaeas-latest-iran-npt-safeguards-report-tehran-continues-to-stonewall>

„This analysis summarizes and assesses information in the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA's) periodic safeguards report, NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty) Safeguards Agreement with the Islamic Republic of Iran, the most recent of which was issued on February 23, 2021. The IAEA report itself represents a thorough overview of the IAEA's investigation in Iran since 2018 and Tehran's continued stonewalling of IAEA requests for explanations and clarifications about undeclared nuclear material and activities. The IAEA calls on Iran to "clarify and resolve these issues without further delay." [...]"

4g)

Analysis of IAEA Iran Verification and Monitoring Report - February 2021

By David Albright, Sarah Burkhard, and Andrea Stricker

February 25, 2021

<https://isis-online.org/isis-reports/detail/analysis-of-iaea-iran-verification-and-monitoring-report-February-2021>

„This report assesses information in the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA's) quarterly safeguards report for February 23, 2021, Verification and monitoring in the Islamic Republic of Iran in light of United Nations Security Council resolution 2231 (2015), including Iran's compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). [...]"

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5a)

US sanctions inflicted \$1 trillion damage on Iran's economy: FM

After the US lifts sanctions and rejoins the JCPOA, Iran will expect some form of compensation, foreign minister Zarif says.

By Maziar Motamedi

February 21, 2021

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/21/us-sanctions-inflicted-1-trillion-damage-on-irans-economy-fm>

„Unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States inflicted \$1 trillion worth of damage on Iran’s economy and Tehran expects compensation, its foreign minister said. Mohammad Javad Zarif said on Sunday after the US takes action to restore Iran’s 2015 nuclear deal with world powers through lifting sanctions, Tehran will want to negotiate on the damages it has suffered. “When we meet, we will raise compensation,” Zarif told the Iranian state-owned news network PressTV in an hour-long interview. “Whether those compensations will take the form of reparation, or whether they take the form of investment, or whether they take the form of measures to prevent a repeat of what Trump did,” he said in reference to former US President Donald Trump. [...]“

5b)

U.S.-Iran Talks Will Falter Unless Abdolnaser Hemmati Is at the Table

Unwinding sanctions will be central to reviving the nuclear deal. If the Biden administration wants a lasting solution, it must involve Iran’s central bank governor.

By Esfandiyar Batmanghahelidj, Saheb Sadeghi

February 25, 2021

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/02/25/u-s-iran-talks-will-falter-unless-abdolnaser-hemmati-is-at-the-table/>

„[...] According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Iran retains access to just \$8.8 billion of readily available foreign currency, roughly one-tenth of its total reserves. Without access to its reserves held in countries like Iraq, South Korea, Japan, and Germany, the central bank has struggled to forestall the weakening of Iran’s currency, which is today worth less than one-fifth of its value prior to Trump’s withdrawal from the nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). This deep depreciation made imported goods more expensive, contributing to annual inflation rates of nearly 50 percent. [...]“

„[...] In September 2019, the Trump administration designated Iran’s central bank under a terrorism authority, a move that jeopardized long-standing exemptions permitting the bank to play a crucial role in facilitating the purchase of humanitarian goods such as food and medicine. In February 2020, the U.S. Treasury Department issued a new general license to allay those concerns. But more troubling was the intention behind the terrorism designation, which was applied to Iran’s central bank for the express purpose of making it harder for a potential Democratic administration to lift sanctions on the bank in the future. [...]“

5c)

Iran: South Korea releasing \$1B frozen by US sanctions

By Joseph Choi

February 23, 2021

<https://thehill.com/policy/international/540027-iran-south-korea-releasing-1b-frozen-by-us-sanctions>

„An Iranian government spokesperson on Tuesday said that South Korea will be releasing \$1 billion in frozen assets as an “initial step” in resolving a dispute between the two countries. [...] According to Rabiei, there is currently \$7 billion to \$10 billion worth of oil payments held in South Korea. Bloomberg reports that Rabiei linked the release of Iranian funds to the recent seizure of a South Korean oil tanker. [...]“

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6a)

Alternative Workers News – Iran

Issue No. 131

February 15, 2021

<https://amirmortasawi.files.wordpress.com/2021/03/awni-no.-131.pdf>

6b)

Alternative Workers News – Iran

Issue No. 132

March 1, 2021

<https://amirmortasawi.files.wordpress.com/2021/03/awni-132-1-1.pdf>

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7)

‘They wasted away four years of my life’

Danielle Pletka and Wang Xiyue in an interview

February 26, 2021

The American Enterprise Institute

<https://www.aei.org/op-eds/they-wasted-away-four-years-of-my-life/>

„Wang Xiyue is a Jeane Kirkpatrick fellow at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington and a Ph.D. candidate at Princeton University. An American citizen, he went to Iran in 2016 for historical research at the height of the Obama-era US-Iran rapprochement. After some months there, he was detained, then arrested, charged, and finally sentenced to 10 years imprisonment for spying by Iran’s Revolutionary Court. He was freed in a prisoner swap in 2019. He spoke to Danielle Pletka on February 24, 2021.[...]“

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8)

Buried for 4,000 years, this ancient culture could expand the 'Cradle of Civilization'

Flooding in 2001 near Jiroft, Iran, exposed the ruins of an ancient necropolis from a Bronze Age culture that flourished alongside Mesopotamia.

By Byantonio Ratti

February 25, 2021

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/jiroft-culture-iran-lost-civilization>

„[...] In early 2001 flooding caused the Halil River to overflow its banks and erode the surrounding lands. Layers of sediment were washed away, and the remains of an ancient cemetery were exposed. Locals and looters quickly recognized the importance of the find and moved to collect and sell the artifacts they were finding. [...] The full import of the discovery became clearer after archaeologists made formal surveys of the area and found that this undocumented culture dated back nearly 5,000 years to the Bronze Age. [...] Lasting for several seasons, excavations near Jiroft began in February 2003, under the direction of Iranian archaeologist Yousef Madjidzadeh. Madjidzadeh's team identified a main necropolis, which they named Mahtoutabad. Most of the initial findings and artifacts are believed to have come from this site despite the looting of grave goods prior to the excavations. Almost a mile to the west of the necropolis, archaeologists targeted for further study two large artificial mounds that rose above the plain. [...]“