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Iran

Digest

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Iranian leadership blames ‘NATO expansion’ for the crisis in Ukraine

On 24 January, the day Russian forces invaded Ukraine, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in a [phone call](#) to his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin concurred with Moscow’s position against NATO’s expansion, noting that “NATO’s eastward expansion is a serious threat to the stability and security of independent countries in different regions.” A day later Foreign Minister [Hossein Amir-Abdollahian](#) struck a more cautious note expressing hope that “the ongoing crisis will be settled through political talks.” Supreme Leader [Ayatollah Khamenei](#), while advocating for ending the war in Ukraine, blamed the West for the crisis: “the root of the crisis in Ukraine are the US policies that create crisis, and Ukraine is one victim of these policies.” On the fallout of the crisis in Ukraine on [nuclear talks](#) in Vienna, former chairman of the Iranian parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Heshamatollah Falahatpisheh argued that “Russians carry out their international policies – JCPOA is one of those – based on their first foreign policy priority which is Ukraine... they would not have let the (nuclear) talks reach a result before they attacked Ukraine.”

Nuclear Talks in final stages, Iran insist it will not cross its redlines

On 25 February, Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator Ali Bagheri returned to Tehran for consultations over the draft agreement to return to mutual compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The meeting of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council ([SNSC](#)) aimed at reaching a decision on the draft was attended by Supreme Leader Khamenei. On 28 February, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson noted that 98 per cent of the draft agreement was agreed, but remaining issues in the fields of removal of sanctions, guarantees and some political claims about Iran’s peaceful nuclear programme required

the West to make ‘political decision’. Softening its position on guarantee against violation of the deal in future, Iran is now seeking ‘[inherent guarantees](#)’ in the JCPOA rather than legal or political guarantees from Washington. Secretary of the SNSC Ali Shamkhani defined the ‘inherent guarantees’ in terms of the “peaceful capability of Iran’s nuclear program, which must always remain like [Sword of Damocles](#) above the heads of violators as a real guarantee for fulfilment of their obligations.”

Oman’s Foreign Minister Visits Iran

On 23 February, Omani Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Albusaidi visited Tehran for consultations on bilateral, regional and international issues. Albusaidi met with Raisi and presented him a [letter from Sultan of Oman](#) and invitation for him to visit Oman. Traditionally, Oman has played mediator between Iran and the US and its Gulf allies. In the past, letters from Sultan of Oman to Iran conveyed US messages and concessions it was willing to make. The timing of Albusaidi’s visit during final stages of nuclear negotiations suggest a similar objective behind the visit. Foreign Minister Abdollahian in his [joint press meet](#) with Albusaidi, noted that negotiations in Vienna have reached a critical stage and under no circumstances will Iran’s negotiators cross their red lines. On the issue of direct negotiations with the US, Abdollahian stated that for Iran “what matters to us is what will be the benefit of this direct talks and whether the future is different from what has happened in the current negotiations and whether there is any achievement beyond what is agreed in Vienna or not.”

Iran unveils third-generation ballistic missile

On 9 February, in run-up to the commemoration of the 43rd anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, Aerospace Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps

(IRGC) unveiled a new [long-range ballistic missile](#) with a range of 1,450 km. Khayber Shekan (Castle Buster) is a third-generation long-range missile, which is capable of penetrating into missile shields with high manoeuvrability during the landing stage. It is solid-propellant missile, which requires much less time to launch in comparison to previous generations, making it less vulnerable to pre-emption. Iran is the [only country](#) to have developed missiles of this range without first having developed nuclear weapons. It has fended off demands from [European countries](#) and [Saudi Arabia](#) to include Iran's missile program in nuclear talks by maintaining that Tehran's ballistic missiles are defensive and unrelated to the nuclear negotiations with world powers. In December 2021, during a military drill conducted amid renewed Israeli threats to target Iran's nuclear facilities, the IRGC Aerospace Force simultaneously test-fired 16 [precision guided](#) surface-to-surface missiles with ranges varying between 350km-2000 km.

Raisi attends Gas Exporting Countries Forum in Qatar

On 22 February, Iran's president Ebrahim Raisi travelled to Doha to attend the Summit of [Gas Exporting Countries Forum](#) (GECF). Iran is a founding member of inter-governmental organization, which currently has 19 member states. At the Summit, Raisi said Iran's energy strategy seeks to boost gas production and provide greater access to regional countries. Iran's Minister of Petroleum Javad Oji at the Extraordinary Ministerial meeting of the GECF held a day earlier in Doha noted that Tehran is prepared to trade natural gas and LNG with members of the Forum through various ways including swap, transit and other common methods. Underlining [Iran's advantages](#) in expanding to new markets, Oji noted that "we not only have one of the largest gas reserves in the world, but also neighbor some of the world's largest gas reserve holders, including Russia,

Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan in the north and Qatar in the south. We also have access to gas export corridors to Europe via Turkey." Iran, which has one of the largest national gas distribution networks but lacks in Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) infrastructure, focuses on supplying neighboring countries, but has also expressed willingness to supply European markets as well.

Minister says Iran is pursuing 'strong diplomacy' with Afghanistan over Helmand River

On 23 February, Iranian Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi, while visiting south-eastern Iranian province of Sistan and Balouchestan, where [Helmand River](#) (called Hirmand in Iran) flows, said country is using 'a strong diplomacy' to get its water rights. The issue of water allocation from Helmand is a long and complicated one, going back to 1870s when Afghanistan was under British control and Iran-Afghan border was drawn along the main branch of Helmand. The [1973 accord](#) between Iran and Afghanistan entitled Iran, the lower riparian state, to 820 million cubic meters a year, equal to 22 cubic meters every second. In recent years, Iran has alleged that Afghanistan does not respect its water rights and that Iranian part the river has been almost dry after Afghanistan built several small and big dams on the river. On 19 January, after viral videos of water being released from [Kamal Khan dam](#) emerged, Iran expected it was headed to its Hamoun Pond, the only freshwater lake in Iran. Later, spokesman of Taliban's Ministry and Power clarified that water had been released to irrigate agricultural lands surrounding the dam.