



MIDDLE EAST WEEKLY

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Middle East in a Week

Regarding international relations and world politics, the Middle East may be the most controversial region in the current times. On the one hand it sits on most of the world's oil reserves, while on the other hand, it inhibits the followers of the most controversial religion in the world, Islam. These matters combined have created a region filled with drastic events. Every day, there are new wars erupting in the region and every day, there are new ways through which the west and the far east try to increase their influence in the region. This region inhibits 411 million people out of which 28 % are under the age of 25 years old. This newsletter tries to give weekly updates on the important issues in the Middle East and combining them with some analysis, hopes to have a role in changing the region's situation to the better.

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I STOP WHEN YOU STOP!!!¹

It seems as if the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran are stuck in a vicious cycle of who makes the first move. Neither side at the moment seems willing to take the first step. The United States has not changed its position on what it will take for it to return to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, a Department of State spokesman said, reiterating that Tehran must make the first move before Washington will be ready to rejoin the pact. Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif suggested on Monday that a European Union official could "synchronize" or "coordinate" efforts by Iran and the US to return to full compliance with the deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Asked about Zarif's proposal for a synchronized return, US State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters on Tuesday that the US is "prepared to walk the path of diplomacy – if Iran resumes that full compliance" with the agreement. "When it comes to the propositions that have been put on the table, I would just go back to the proposition that we've put on the table," said Price.



THEY WILL BE RELEASED²

Not so long ago, the Iranian Government seized a South Korean sea vessel with its crew. Just recently, its officials announced that they have agreed to allow the crew members of a South Korean ship it seized last month for alleged environmental pollution to leave the country. "Following a request by the South Korean government ... the crew of the Korean ship ... have received permission to leave the country in a humanitarian move by Iran," Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said on Tuesday. Khatibzadeh said the legal case against the South Korean-flagged MT Hankuk Chemi and its captain continues. He did not specify whether the crew, which included sailors from Indonesia, Myanmar, South Korea and Vietnam, had already left. "The two sides ... shared the view that the release of the sailors was an important first step to restore trust between the two countries and they will work to resolve the issue of frozen Iranian assets in South Korean banks," South Korea's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.



THEY FINALLY GOT THE VACCINE³

After a considerable delay, the Palestinians in the occupied west bank are finally receiving vaccinations for the COVID-19. The Palestinian Authority (PA) has started COVID vaccination in the occupied West Bank after receiving 2,000 doses from Israel, Palestinian officials said. The Moderna vaccines are the first batch of the promised 5,000 shots to be delivered by Israel to inoculate medical workers. In recent weeks, Israel has faced mounting global pressure, including from the United Nations, to help Palestinians living under Israeli occupation in the West Bank and the besieged Gaza Strip to gain access to vaccines. The PA has previously said it signed contracts with four vaccine providers, including the makers of Russia's Sputnik V. Last month, it said it had arranged to procure enough vaccines to cover 70 percent of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinians hope to acquire tens of thousands more doses in the coming weeks through a World Health Organization (WHO) program.



NEAR THE POINT OF NO RETURN⁵

As the US and the other participants of the JCPOA keep tip toeing in meeting their requirements according to the so called “Iran Nuclear Deal”, Iran keeps distancing from her commitments farther and further away. Iran says it has installed new and more advanced centrifuges at its two main nuclear sites, a development that has been confirmed by the United Nations’ nuclear watchdog. Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran’s envoy to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), announced on Tuesday that new cascades of centrifuges at the underground Natanz and Fordow sites were installed. “Two cascades of 348 IR2m centrifuges with almost four times the capacity of IR1 are now running with UF6 successfully in Natanz,” he wrote on Twitter in reference to uranium hexafluoride that is used in enriching uranium. On Monday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Iran could be months, or even weeks, away from developing enough fissile material for a nuclear bomb if it continued on the current path. Iran, meanwhile, has maintained its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes.

ISRAEL: IRAN WILL SOON HAVE IT⁴

While some states believe Iran's intentions to be quite peaceful and some others believing Iran's abilities to be quite far from the capability of making a nuclear weapon, Israel believes the intentions to be quite hostile and the ability to be quite high. Israel's energy minister says it would take Iran six months to produce enough fissile material for a single nuclear weapon – a timeline twice as long as that anticipated by a senior member of the Biden administration. Israel is wary of the Biden administration's intent to re-enter the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran and has long opposed the agreement. Washington argues that the Trump administration's withdrawal from the deal backfired by prompting Iran to abandon caps on nuclear activities. Speaking last month a day before he took office as US secretary of state, Antony Blinken said the so-called "breakout time" – in which Iran could ramp up enrichment of uranium to bomb-fuel purity – "has gone from beyond a year [under the deal] to about three or four months". He said he based his comments on information in public reporting.



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