



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

Iranian Studies Unit Conference

Iran: The Raisi Presidency One Year On

22-23 August 2022

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Online Registration





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About the Conference

The Iranian Studies Unit of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies will hold its annual conference from 22-23 August 2022. The topic of this year's conference is "Iran: The Raisi Presidency One Year On."

In an election with the lowest voter turnout of any presidential election to date, Ebrahim Raisi, Iran's former head of the judiciary, became the eighth president of the Islamic Republic of Iran in June 2021. The new president came to office amid a wave of voter apathy, poor economic performance, and general disenchantment with the political system. Raisi's election represents the first time in post-Khomeini Iran when the president's ideological dispositions and priorities are aligned with those of the *velayat-e faqih*.

Summer 2022 marks the first anniversary of Raisi's inauguration. The two-day conference, featuring a selection of scholars of Iran, will analyse the first year of Raisi's presidency by examining the continuities and changes in politics and policies. The conference covers the following topics:

- Iranian foreign policy, especially Iran's relations with the great powers; Iran and the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); Iran and non-state actors; nuclear negotiations and the JCPOA; and Iran in the Caucasus;
- Domestic politics, including the role of the various political institutions; the legitimacy of the system; treatment of activists; media freedoms, the future of the *velayat-e faqih*; the religious establishment; labor issues and activism; protests; cyber activism and restrictions;
- The Iranian economy, with a focus on the impact of sanctions; cryptocurrency; workforce and employment; income inequality; industrial manufacturing and production; agricultural production;
- Public policy, including the state's approach to the COVID-19 pandemic and healthcare, demographic shifts and developments, refugees, climate change and environmental challenges, and cyberspace.

Conference participants include a number of prominent scholars, among them Hamid Ahmadi, Leen Al-Rabbat, Hassan Muzaffar Al-Razzo, Omair Anas, Gawdat Bahgat, Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj, Abdolrasool Divsallar, Javad Heiran-Nia, Bernard Hourcade, Nikolay Kozhanov, Eric Lob, Amir Mahdavi, Rovshan Mammadli, Ilkhom Mirzoev, Mahmood Monshipouri, Seyed Hossein Mousavian, Mahmoud Muhareb, and Mahjoob Zweiri.

Timetable

Day 1, Monday, 22 August 2022

Register



ID: 879 6019 4449

9:00-9:30	Registration
9:30-9:45	Opening Remarks Speaker Mehran Kamrava
9:45-10:45	Keynote Lecture Iranian Foreign Policy and the Raisi Presidency Moderator: Mehran Kamrava Speaker Seyed Hossein Mousavian
10:45-11:00	Coffee Break
11:00-12:30	Panel (1) Ebrahim Raisi's Election Moderator: Mehran Kamrava Speakers Amir Mahdavi: The 2021 Presidential Election as a Turning Point in the Typology of the Islamic Republic Hamid Ahmadi: The Instrumental Dimensions of Ethnic Politics in Iran Ilkhom Mirzoev: The Reformist Faction after the 2021 Presidential Elections: Diverging Strategies and the Notion of "Structural Reforms"
12:30-14:00	Lunch

<p>14:00-15:15</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Panel (2) Iran and the GCC</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Moderator: Marwan Kabalan</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Speakers</p> <p>Abdolrasool Divsallar: The Militarisation of Iran's Perception of Saudi Threat: Implications for Regional Security Building</p> <p>Mahjoob Zweiri and Leen Al-Rabbat: Navigating Murky Waters: Iranian-Gulf Relations a Year into Raisi's Presidency</p>
<p>15:15-15:30</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Coffee Break</p>
<p>15:30-16:45</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Panel (3) Iran's Relations with Africa and South Asia</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Moderator: Mohammed Hemchi</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Speakers</p> <p>Eric Lob*: Iran-Africa Relations under Raisi: Salvaging Ties with the Continent</p> <p>Omar Anas: Iran's South Asian Balancing Act and India-Iran Relations</p>

* Attending online

- Timing of panels is based on Doha local time (GMT +3).

Day 2, Tuesday, 23 August 2022

Register



ID: 869 2112 1326

9:30-10:45	<p style="text-align: center;">Panel (4) Domestic and Cyber Politics</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Moderator: Ibrahim Fraihat</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Speakers</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Bernard Hourcade: The Domestic Policy of Ebrahim Raisi: Conservative or Pragmatic?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Hassan Muzaffar Al-Razzo: Iran's Cyber Deterrence Strategy a Year into Raisi's Presidency</p>
10:45-11:00	Coffee Break
11:00-12:15	<p style="text-align: center;">Panel (5) Iran, the US, and Israel</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Moderator: Emad Kaddorah</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Speakers</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Mahmood Muhareb: Israel and Iran's Nuclear Program</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Gawdat Bahgat: US-Iran Relations: Challenges and Opportunities</p>
12:15-13:45	Lunch

<p>13:45-15:00</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Panel (6) Sanctions and Iran's Economy</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Moderator: Hamid Ali</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Speakers</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj*: Measuring the Effects of Sanctions on Iran: Theory and Practice</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Nikolay Kozhanov: Between Development, Growth, and Survival: Iran's Economic Priorities under President Raisi</p>
<p>15:00-15:15</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Coffee Break</p>
<p>15:15-16:30</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Panel (7) Iran and the Caucasus</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Moderator: Aicha Elbasri</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Speakers</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Javad Heiran-Nia and Mahmood Monshipouri: Raisi and Iran's Foreign Policy toward the South Caucasus</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Rovshan Mammadli: Three Challenges Facing Iran after the Nagorno-Karabakh War</p>
<p>16:30-16:45</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Closing Remarks</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Speaker</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Mehran Kamrava</p>

* Attending online

- Timing of panels is based on Doha local time (GMT +3).

Participants

Abstracts



Hamid Ahmadi

Professor of Political Science at the University of Tehran. He was a visiting professor of political science in METU in Turkey (2003-2004); Carleton University, Canada (2011-2012); and the University of Lyon, France (2019). Ahmadi's area of studies and research includes Middle Eastern and Iranian politics, ethnicity, nationalism, and identity. His published articles include: "Nationalism in Iran" in *The Routledge Handbook of Persian Gulf Politics* (Routledge, 2020), "The Clash of Nationalisms: Iranian Response to Baku's Irredentism" in *The Great Game in West Asia* (Oxford University Press, 2017), and "Myth, National Identity and Iranian Attitudes Toward International Relations" in *the Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs* (Winter 2015).

The Instrumental Dimensions of Ethnic Politics in Iran

Much scholarship has been devoted to the question of ethnicity and ethnic politics in modern Iran. However, these studies share many common features and suffer remarkable shortcomings as they mainly look into theoretical and political-ideological basis of ethnicity in Iran rather than its historical sociological foundations. The question of nationality and national identity in Iran, on the one side, and the issue of ethnicity and its political dimensions or politicisation, on the other, have more neglected aspects which can promote the academic capacities of the contemporary Iranian studies. Focusing on such capacities can contribute not only to Iranian studies but also to the theoretical literature in contemporary ethnic studies. This paper contends that the rise of the politicisation of ethnicity in Iran is deeply rooted not in the core-periphery dichotomy explanations that most students of Iranian politics tend to rely on, but in elite-state relations following the emergence of a modern state in Iran. In this regard, the instrumental approach and theories to ethnopitics have more merits for explaining the issue in Iran. The role of elites can further explain why ethnicity has become political since the early twentieth century. However, while the radical opposition elites have instrumentally politicised ethnicity and used it against the Pahlavi state, this instrumentalisation of ethnicity has been done not only by them but also by loyal and pro-Islamic Republic elites in the pseudo democratic political game. While Ebrahim Raisi's presidential election campaign and program, in comparison to Hassan Rouhani's, reflected less reliance on the instrumental use of ethnicity, political elites competing for other institutions such as the parliament, and provincial and local councils have followed the instrumental approach to ethnicity.



Leen Al-Rabbat

Research Assistant at the Gulf Studies Center, Qatar University.

Navigating Murky Waters: Iranian-Gulf Relations a Year into Raisi's Presidency

This paper examines the first year of Ebrahim Raisi's presidency and focuses on the relations between Iran and the neighbouring Gulf states. It analyses how President Raisi was able to navigate his foreign policies amidst numerous unfolding crises during his first few months of presidency, mainly: the political change in Afghanistan with the total control of Taliban, the Azerbaijani clashes with neighbouring Armenia, the ramification of the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal in 2018, the overbearing uncertainty of the ongoing negotiations in Vienna, and the challenging outcome of the Iraqi and Lebanese elections. Furthermore, the paper assesses the legacy of Hassan Rouhani and the political scene he left behind for the Raisi administration, including the lasting effects of Rouhani's initiative to promote regional cooperation through HOPE (Hormuz Peace Endeavor). Finally, the paper discusses different elements of Iranian-Gulf relations, focusing on the Saudi-Iranian relations amidst ongoing peace talks in Iraq.



Hassan Muzaffar Al-Razzo

Director of the Mosul Center for Strategic and Future Studies. He has worked as a government advisor for strategic planning affairs, and as a consultant to the United Nations Development Program and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. His interests involve strategic planning, knowledge economy, smart computing applications, macro-data management, and cybersecurity, especially Iranian cybersecurity. He has published two books on Iranian cyber strategy and its activities in the Arab region, *Iranian Hacking Groups and Digital Militias*, published by the International Institute for Iranian Studies in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 2019, and *The Iranian Cyber Threat – An Addition to Its Nuclear Program and Possible Role in Fuelling a New Type of Conflict*, published by the Arab Democratic Center in Berlin, Germany, 2020. He has also published multiple studies on cyber security in the Gulf states with the Al Jazeera Studies Center, including: "Cyber Conflicts and Confrontations in the Space of the Arab Gulf Region," September 2019, "Cyber Hurricane: Unprecedented US Security Exposure," December 2020, and "Digital Conflict: Gulf States amid the US-Chinese Tug-of-War," May 2021.

Iran's Cyber Deterrence Strategy a Year into Raisi's Presidency

Iran has successfully gained a foothold for itself on the global cyber security arena, dominated by advanced countries in possession of expansive digital technology, such as the United States, Russia, China, North Korea, and Israel. It has consolidated its success through the establishment of a complex structure for defence institutions and cyberwars, characterised by layers of intertwined departments and interconnected relations between offensive and defensive units, spread across the military, security, government, and civil institutions. Through this structure, opponents in the geopolitical cyber field have inherited a major obstacle in tracking Iranian offensive potential or estimating the extent of Iranian cyber power in the virtual space. With the expansion of Iran's cyber capabilities, cyber deterrence agencies, and complex institutional building, the geopolitical cyber field has become of great concern to the United States, Israel, and Iran's neighbours. This paper outlines the institutional structure of Iranian cyber strategy, highlighting its most important characteristics and identifying the changes that have occurred since Ebrahim Raisi came to power. The study also suggests potential developments in light of the geopolitical tensions between Iran and the West due to the former's expanded cyber-activity — a serious threat to its opponents.



Omair Anas

Assistant Professor in the Department of International Relations at Ankara Yildirim Beyazit University (AYBU), Turkey. Prior to joining AYBU, Ankara, he worked as Research Fellow at the Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi. He is also a Director Research at New Delhi-based Centre for India-West Asia Dialogue.

Iran's South Asian Balancing Act and India-Iran Relations

Iran's most significant foreign policy challenge may not always be in the Gulf, where the fault lines and choices are obvious. In South Asia, Iranian foreign policymakers have faced a complex and challenging balancing act between three nuclear powers, India, China, and Pakistan, and three Muslim nations, namely Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. In countries such as India, Iran maintained a continuity of pre-Islamic revolution relations; in Pakistan, Iran wanted to revise the template by introducing ideological elements; and in Afghanistan, Iran has a significant sectarian advantage that it plays in its favour. Iran too presents a unique security puzzle for South Asian nations. For India, Iran's nuclear ambitions remain the biggest fear, but its "pro-Shia" credentials complement its Pakistan policy. For Pakistan, Iran qualifies as a reliable energy provider, but Pakistan views Iran's Shia activism as a potentially destabilising factor in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The paper argues that Iran's South Asia policy is stuck in a dilemma to advance a sectarian versus nationalist or ideological identity. Meanwhile, Iran faces another dilemma of choosing between political economy and the security of Islamic revolutionary regime. So far, Iranian foreign policy has failed to conciliate security, economy, and identity, whatever it wishes to assume.



Gawdat Bahgat

Professor of National Security Affairs at the National Defense University's Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Study (NESA). His areas of expertise include energy security, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, counter-terrorism, the Arab-Israeli conflict, North Africa, and the US foreign policy in the Middle East. Bahgat is the author of a number of books including *Defending Iran from Revolutionary Guards to Ballistic Missiles* (2021), *Security and Bilateral Issues between Iran and Its Arab Neighbors* (2016), *Energy Security in the Gulf* (2015), *Alternative Energy in the Middle East* (2013), *Energy Security* (2011), *International Political Economy* (2010), *Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East* (2007), *Israel and the Persian Gulf* (2006), and *American Oil Diplomacy* (2003). Bahgat's articles have appeared in *International Affairs*, *Middle East Journal*, *Middle East Policy*, *Oil and Gas Journal*, and *OPEC Review*, among others. He has contributed to the *CNN*, *BBC*, *Washington Post* and *Al-Jazeera*. His work has been translated to several foreign languages.

US-Iran Relations: Challenges and Opportunities

Since 1980, diplomatic relations between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran have been severed. This lack of formal diplomatic channels does not tell the whole story. For four decades, the two nations have seen each other as archenemies and have engaged in hostile economic and diplomatic activities and, occasionally, in direct and indirect military confrontations. Furthermore, in almost every regional conflict, Tehran and Washington have supported opposite sides and engaged in proxy wars. This study examines the key forces that shape the relations between the two nations. Despite the intense animosity, the analysis suggests, there is room for rapprochement. Reduced tension between Iran and the United States is certain to reinforce regional stability and security.



Esfandiyar Batmanghelidj

Founder of the Bourse & Bazaar Foundation, a think tank focused on economic development and economic diplomacy in the Middle East and Central Asia, with a particular focus on Iran. He has published peer reviewed research on Iranian political economy, social history, and public health, as well as commentary on Iranian politics and economics. From 2021-2022, Batmanghelidj was a visiting fellow with the Middle East and North Africa programme at the European Council on Foreign Relations. He holds a BA in political science and Middle Eastern studies from Columbia University. From 2021 to 2023, he will be completing an executive master's in public administration at the London School of Economics.

Measuring the Effects of Sanctions on Iran: Theory and Practice

This paper examines the growing use of the synthetic control method (SCM) to analyse the effects of sanctions on the Iranian economy. The construction of a "synthetic Iran" enables researchers to compare the experience of Iran under sanctions with a counterfactual scenario in which sanctions had not been imposed. The paper will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the SCM approach and explore how it can be paired with other forms of quantitative and qualitative analysis to identify the discrete effects of sanctions on the Iranian economy. The paper previews newly conducted SCM analysis on Iranian economic growth, merchandise trade, inflation, and government expenditure.



Abdolrasool Divsallar

Non-Resident Scholar at the Middle East Institute in Washington and a visiting Professor of Middle Eastern Studies at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan. He co-founded the Regional Security Initiative (RSI) at the Middle East Directions Programme of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the European University Institute (EUI). In this role, he led a combined research and dialogues project on rethinking the security architecture in the Gulf region and worked closely with EU institutions on this matter. Divsallar has worked extensively on Iranian defence and security policy, great power politics in the Middle East, international security of the Gulf, comparative regional security studies, and nuclear non-proliferation. He is the co-editor of *Stepping Away from the Abyss: A Gradual Approach Towards a New Security System in the Gulf* (2021) and has published nine other books as well as dozens of papers in top international journals.

The Militarisation of Iran's Perception of Saudi Threat: Implications for Regional Security Building

The relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia have been characterised historically by regional competitions and rivalry but remained mostly non-adversarial. However, developments in recent years shifted this pattern and added significant levels of militarisation. This paper argues that while previously Iran viewed Saudi Arabia's military power as an extension of the US regional power, Iranian elites have started to view Riyadh as an independent military threat. In a shift from the early 2000s military doctrine, the threat of Saudi Arabia's military capability is no more linked to a US-Iran war scenario. It is seen by Tehran as a factor that may alter the balance of power against it. This new perception has not only caused a strategic readjustment of Saudi Arabia's position in the Iranian military doctrine, but it has also impacted Iran's regional policy towards Riyadh. This paper explores whether Saudi-Iran talks under President Ebrahim Raisi and his deeper ties with security elites can alter this emerging trend. Can Raisi's presidency impact security elites' assessments and fear of military imbalance in the region? How can elites' concerns limit Raisi's ability to bring a meaningful change in Iran-Saudi relations? What implications should be expected for regional security building in the Gulf?



Javad Heiran-Nia

International Relations Director of the Gulf Studies Group at the Center for scientific Research and Middle East Strategic Studies, Iran. He received his PhD from Islamic Azad University Central Tehran Branch (2018). His articles have appeared in *Middle East Policy*, *Strategic Analysis journal*, *Middle East Studies Quarterly*, *Studies on Israel-US Quarterly*, *The Scientific Journal of Strategy*, *LobeLog*, *The Atlantic Council*, *Iran and The Caucasus*, *Manara Magazine*, and *Insight Turkey*. Heiran-Nia's commentary and interviews have been published by leading outlets including *NewsWeek*, *Anadolu Agency*, *The Asahi Shimbun*, *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, *Alarab*, *Mehr News Agency* and *The Tehran Times*. He is currently working on a book titled *Persian Gulf's Security Orders*.

Raisi and Iran's Foreign Policy toward the South Caucasus

In the aftermath of the Karabakh war (2020), Iran's president, Ebrahim Raisi, has faced new geopolitical constraints in the South Caucasus. The overlapping strategic interests of Russia and Turkey have seriously constrained the manoeuvrability of Iran and the collaboration between Moscow and Ankara following the Karabakh war is likely to significantly diminish Iran's interests in the region. As a NATO member, Turkey can threaten Russia's monopoly on gas supplies to Europe by playing the role of the middle fastening in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and transferring energy through Turkmenistan-Azerbaijan-Nakhchivan to Europe. Russia has clearly aligned its interests with those of Turkey's — a development that will have negative consequences for Iran's interests in the region. By playing the Iranian-Azeri card, Turkey can also limit Iran's options in the Caucasus. To counter these moves, the Raisi administration has cooperated with Baku on the Turkmen gas swap project and the completion of the North-South Corridor. This paper demonstrates that Iran's leverage and assets in the South Caucasus are limited, in part due to Tehran's strained relations with Washington, but largely because of its 20-year strategic agreement with Russia — not to mention that Iran's attempt to become a permanent member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) has further deepened its dependency on Russia.



Bernard Hourcade

Senior Research Fellow Emeritus at National Center for Scientific Research, Paris. He was also a lecturer in geography at the University of Pau (1973-1978), and the Director of the French Institute of Research in Iran during the Iranian revolution (1978-1993). His works are based on field research in cooperation with Iranian scholars, focusing on social, cultural, and political geography, urban studies, and the geopolitics of Iran. He has published several statistical atlases of Iran (1998), the Tehran metropolis (2005), and of presidential elections of Iran (2021). Hourcade also provides analysis on Iran and consultations for French and international political think tanks and media outlets.

The Domestic Policy of Ebrahim Raisi: Conservative or Pragmatic?

Ebrahim Raisi was elected by a large consensus among conservative factions. This alliance under the leadership of the Supreme Leader has immediately pushed forward some very conservative regulations and "revolutionary" slogans, but this "ultraconservative" image of the new president cannot explain the current domestic and foreign policy of the Islamic Republic. Raisi belongs to a new generation that grew up during the dramatic throes of the revolution and the subsequent Iraq-Iran war. He does not have the experience of the ideological debates of the 60's and 70's when political Islam was in the making in the mood of Marxism and Third-Worldism. His long career of "apparatchik" and his personal links with institutions like *Astan-e Qods Razavi* make him perhaps less ideological and more of a pragmatist, with the support of the traditional layers of the society. De facto, he is implementing, for his own benefit, the main trends of Ruhani's "moderate" and/or "reformist" government about the JCPOA, the economy, and the relations with neighbouring states, particularly Saudi Arabia. He prioritises the economy, and travels around all the provinces while strengthening the domestic security and intelligence at the same time. The main challenges are the social demands and the possible popular upheaval of the new well-educated middle-class which did not vote for him. Concurrently, clerics, pasdaran, and the Islamic technocrats want above all to secure the future of the Islamic regime.



Nikolay Kozhanov

Research Associate Professor at the Gulf Studies Center of Qatar University. He is also a non-resident scholar at Program on Economics and Energy at the Middle East Institute, Washington DC. His research interests are focused on the geopolitics of Gulf hydrocarbons and Iran's economy. Nikolay holds his PhD in economics from St. Petersburg State University (2010).

Between Development, Growth, and Survival: Iran's Economic Priorities under President Raisi

For the last decade, economic policies in Iran have always been aimed at building and sustaining the so-called "resistance economy" — a partially self-sufficient economic system with strong state presence, the primary goal of which is ensuring the survival of the regime in an unfriendly environment. This system has repeatedly achieved its goal over the years. In spite of severe sanctions introduced between 2018 and 2020, and the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Iranian economy is still standing. Yet, while this model successfully prevented an economic collapse, it also hindered the prospects for sustainable economic development accompanied by a meaningful improvement in social indicators. As a result of the rapidly deteriorating economic situation in the country — which is causing popular unrest and widening the trust gap between the people and the regime — Ebrahim Raisi will likely be forced to make changes to the "resistance economy" model. The conservative circles in Iran have long criticised their moderate rivals' failure to grow the economy and improve the living standards of the people during their time in power. Thus, as a president, Raisi faces immense pressure to deliver not only economic growth but also better living standards. If he fails to do so, the Iranian people may lose the remaining trust they have, not only in the conservative establishment, but in the entire political system. Furthermore, ensuring economic success is also important for Raisi's own political future, as he is allegedly the first in line to become Iran's next Supreme Leader. This paper studies the economic strategies adopted by Raisi's cabinet during his first year in office in an attempt to understand the priorities set by the new president, and examines their divergence/convergence with those pursued by his predecessor, assessing their potential impact on Iran's economic development.



Eric Lob

Associate Professor in the Department of Politics and International Relations at Florida International University. His research focuses on the intersection of politics and development in the Middle East and he authored the book *Iran's Reconstruction Jihad: Rural Development and Regime Consolidation after 1979* (Cambridge University Press, 2020). His articles have been published in *The International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *Iranian Studies*, *Middle East Critique*, *The Middle East Journal*, *The Muslim World*, *Third World Quarterly*, and others. He is a Non-Resident Scholar of the Middle East Institute (MEI) Iran Program and a Board of Trustees member of the American Institute of Iranian Studies (AIIS).

Iran-Africa Relations under Raisi: Salvaging Ties with the Continent

As early as the third day of his presidency, Ebrahim Raisi began to meet with African officials and called for increasing political and economic cooperation with Africa. Contrary to popular perception, Raisi's meetings and statements with these officials were not part of a hegemonic project to further expand Iranian influence in Africa. Rather, they constituted an effort to reset relations with the continent after his predecessor, Hassan Rouhani, spent eight years neglecting it while pursuing rapprochement with the West and later the East. This paper examines Raisi's foreign policy toward Africa in comparison with that of his predecessors. Beyond rhetoric, the question remains whether Raisi will differentiate himself from Rouhani in practice by prioritising Africa and restoring relations with the long-time allies and top trading partners that severed ties with Iran in 2016. So far, Raisi has mainly met with officials from countries of second- and third-tier commercial importance in terms of bilateral trade, though they have other historical, diplomatic, and strategic significance. The lone exception is Ethiopia, to which Iran, alongside its regional rivals, has offered military aid during the Tigray War. The research analyses data taken from the reports on official meetings, bilateral agreements, trade flows, and arms sales.



Amir Mahdavi

PhD candidate in comparative politics at the University of Connecticut. He also holds two master's degrees in history and Middle East studies from Brandeis University and Harvard University, respectively. As a research associate at the Crown Center, he published five Middle East Brief papers on various topics of Iranian affairs. He was also a research associate at the Harvard Institute for Quantitative Social Science from 2015 to 2017. He has ten years of political journalism experience as editor of several outlets in Tehran, and his political analyses of Iran and the region have appeared in *The Washington Post*, *The Guardian*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *Al-Monitor*. Mahdavi has a developing interest in political economy, as reflected in his doctoral dissertation and a forthcoming research project commissioned by the Johns Hopkins University on the politics of government spending patterns and resource allocation in Iran.

The 2021 Presidential Election as a Turning Point in the Typology of the Islamic Republic

What evidence would scholars of authoritarian states use to argue the type of regime has changed? Stemming from Samuel Huntington's waves of democracy theory, sufficient intellectual tools are available to political scientists to analyse transitions from autocracy to democracy and vice versa. However, the criteria that defines the transformation from one type of authoritarian regime to another has not been adequately studied. This paper argues that the 2021 presidential election in Iran can be explained as a departure of the Islamic Republic from an electoral authoritarian regime to a hegemonic autocracy. Following a brief review of the literature on hybrid regimes, it studies the characteristics of electoral authoritarianism in the context of the recent quarter century in Iran. The discussion will then take up the contextual elements that rendered the election of President Ebrahim Raisi a departure from electoral authoritarianism. The gridlock in Iran's domestic politics, international relations, and economy made the collapse of such a hybrid political system inevitable. Finally, it examines the characteristics of the post-2021 political situation with respect to the three forms of hegemonic autocracy — personalist, single-party, and military — that may shape the future of the Islamic Republic under the current constitution.



Rovshan Mammadli

Master's student in international political science in Lithuania. He received his bachelor's degree in Azerbaijan in 2015 and his primary research focus is the security dimension of Azerbaijan-Iran relations. His articles on the subject have been published in local and regional media.

Three Challenges Facing Iran after the Nagorno-Karabakh War

Ebrahim Raisi's presidency coincided with the emergence of a new geopolitical configuration in the South Caucasus as a result of the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia that broke out in September 2020. The subsequent new challenges can be summarised as the strengthening of Israel, an ally of Azerbaijan and Iran's archenemy, and Turkey, Iran's regional rival, as a result of Azerbaijan's defeat of Armenia. In addition, the rhetoric of the Azerbaijani state officials to forcibly take the border lands connecting Armenia to Iran has aroused concerns in Tehran. Although Iran has entertained tensions with Azerbaijan since mid-2021 due to major geopolitical shifts on its northern borders, relations between the two countries returned to normal towards the end of 2021. This paper discusses how the Raisi administration sought to overcome new challenges in the South Caucasus and assesses its success in doing so. It examines Iranian policies towards the region after the recent war and its view of Israel and Turkey's activities in Azerbaijan. Lastly, it analyses Azerbaijan's view of Iranian policy in the region and forecasts expected future trends.



Ilkhom Mirzoev

Research Assistant and a PhD student at the Center for Middle East Studies, Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. His main research interests include political and intellectual history, internal dynamics, and factionalism in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Reformist Faction after the 2021 Presidential Elections: Diverging Strategies and the Notion of "Structural Reforms"

The overwhelming defeat of the reformist faction in the 2021 Presidential elections resulted in their political isolation and entailed a general sense of impasse. These circumstances prompted reformist tacticians to reassess their political praxis in search of a way out of the current deadlock. This paper problematises the current fragmentation of the reformist faction against the background of the conservative grip on power. In this regard, it seeks to outline the process of this faction's marginalisation and highlights the conflicting strategies within it. It argues that while some reformists insisted on restoring the camp's consolidation and active electoral participation at all costs, others seemed to embrace the need for further distancing from the establishment to regain the support of their core constituency. Within the latter trend, the notion of *iṣlāḥāt-i sākhtārī* (structural reforms) has gained currency among the more resolute reformists, due to the epistolary debates between two prominent reformist theoreticians — Mostafa Tajzadeh and Sa'id Hajjarian. Although marginal at the current stage, the notion of structural reforms represents a conceptual landmark that could potentially contribute to the renewal of the mainstream discourse amidst the weakening of reformists and offer an optimistic outlook to their demoralised constituency.

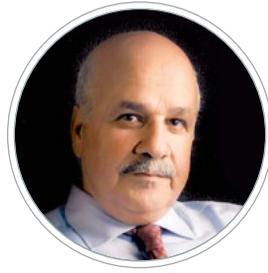


Mahmood Monshipouri

Professor of International Relations at San Francisco State University and a lecturer at Global Studies/ International and Area Studies at UC-Berkeley. Monshipouri is the editor, most recently, of *Why Human Rights Still Matter in Contemporary Global Affairs* (Routledge, 2020), and the author of *Middle East Politics: Changing Dynamics* (Routledge, 2019). His latest book is titled: *In the Shadow of Mistrust: The Geopolitics and Diplomacy of the US-Iran Relations* (Hurst Publishers, 2022). He is currently working on a manuscript under the draft title, *Climate Change, Environmental Refugees, and Forced Migration in the Middle East* (Rowman & Littlefield, forthcoming). His recent articles have appeared in *The Middle East Journal*, *Middle East Policy*, *Insight Turkey*, and *The Maghreb Review*.

Raisi and Iran's Foreign Policy toward the South Caucasus

In the aftermath of the Karabakh war (2020), Iran's president, Ebrahim Raisi, has faced new geopolitical constraints in the South Caucasus. The overlapping strategic interests of Russia and Turkey have seriously constrained the manoeuvrability of Iran and the collaboration between Moscow and Ankara following the Karabakh war is likely to significantly diminish Iran's interests in the region. As a NATO member, Turkey can threaten Russia's monopoly on gas supplies to Europe by playing the role of the middle fastening in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and transferring energy through Turkmenistan-Azerbaijan-Nakhchivan to Europe. Russia has clearly aligned its interests with those of Turkey's — a development that will have negative consequences for Iran's interests in the region. By playing the Iranian-Azeri card, Turkey can also limit Iran's options in the Caucasus. To counter these moves, the Raisi administration has cooperated with Baku on the Turkmen gas swap project and the completion of the North-South Corridor. This paper demonstrates that Iran's leverage and assets in the South Caucasus are limited, in part due to Tehran's strained relations with Washington, but largely because of its 20-year strategic agreement with Russia — not to mention that Iran's attempt to become a permanent member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) has further deepened its dependency on Russia.



Mahmoud Muhareb

Associate Researcher at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. He has published six books, and dozens of studies in peer-reviewed journals dealing with the Palestinian issue and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Israel and Iran's Nuclear Program

This paper explores Israeli policy on the Iranian nuclear program, characterised by the enduring endeavour to maintain its monopoly on nuclear weapons in the Middle East, and its multitude of activities to prevent Iran, or any other country in the region, from breaking that monopoly. The paper examines Israel's production of a large arsenal of nuclear weapons, and its decision to monopolise nuclear weapons in the region, which has dominated its national security strategy for more than four decades. It investigates Israel's repeated claims that Iran has become an existential threat, and unpacks the Israeli calls for imposing the maximum international economic sanctions against Iran, in order to trigger either the complete abandonment of the Iranian nuclear program, or the overthrow of the Iranian regime. It also outlays Israeli policy in dealing with the ongoing negotiations to return to the Iranian nuclear agreement, and its rejection of any political solution that does not lead to a definitive end to the Iranian nuclear program. The paper also highlights the strategic confusion that Israel found itself in, resulting from the many mistaken assumptions of Benjamin Netanyahu's government regarding the Iranian nuclear program. It presents the goals of Israel's "battle between wars" strategy over the last decade, which has intensified in the last year, and the grand strategy against Iran advocated by the ideologues of the Israeli military establishment. The paper also examines the Israeli policy to establish an Israeli-Arab-US military alliance against Iran, the Israeli perception of military attack on Iranian nuclear facilities, and the Israeli vision of what could happen if Iran achieves nuclear capability.



Seyed Hossein Mousavian

Keynote Speaker

Middle East Security and Nuclear Policy Specialist at Princeton University's School of Public and International Affairs. He is a former diplomat who served as Iran's Ambassador to Germany (1990-1997), Head of the Foreign Relations Committee of Iran's National Security Council (1997-2005), Spokesman for Iran in its nuclear negotiations with the international community (2003-2005), Foreign Policy Advisor to the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (2005-2007), Vice President of the Center for Strategic Research for International Affairs (2005-2009), General Director of Foreign Ministry for West Europe (1987-1990), Chief of Parliament Administration (1984-1986), and the editor-in-chief of the English-language international newspaper Tehran Times (1980-1990). Mousavian earned a PhD in international relations from the University of Kent, United Kingdom.



Mahjoob Zweiri

Director of Gulf Studies Center and Professor of Contemporary History and Politics of the Middle East at Qatar University, where he was the Head of Humanities Department 2011-2016. Before joining Qatar University in 2010, Zweiri was a senior researcher in Middle East Politics and Iran at the Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan. From March 2003 to December 2006, he was a research fellow and a director of the Centre for Iranian Studies in the Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at Durham University. Zweiri has more than 80 publications in the areas of Iran and Contemporary Middle East History and Politics.

Navigating Murky Waters: Iranian-Gulf Relations a Year into Raisi's Presidency

This paper examines the first year of Ebrahim Raisi's presidency and focuses on the relations between Iran and the neighbouring Gulf states. It analyses how President Raisi was able to navigate his foreign policies amidst numerous unfolding crises during his first few months of presidency, mainly: the political change in Afghanistan with the total control of Taliban, the Azerbaijani clashes with neighbouring Armenia, the ramification of the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal in 2018, the overbearing uncertainty of the ongoing negotiations in Vienna, and the challenging outcome of the Iraqi and Lebanese elections. Furthermore, the paper assesses the legacy of Hassan Rouhani and the political scene he left behind for the Raisi administration, including the lasting effects of Rouhani's initiative to promote regional cooperation through HOPE (Hormuz Peace Endeavor). Finally, the paper discusses different elements of Iranian-Gulf relations, focusing on the Saudi-Iranian relations amidst ongoing peace talks in Iraq.

Moderators

Hamid Ali

Associate Professor and Dean of the School of Public Administration and Development Economics (SPADE) at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies (DI). He was Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Public Policy and Administration (PPAD) at the American University in Cairo (AUC) from 2013 to 2016. Before joining AUC, he taught at the Southern Methodist University and Texas State University. He was a researcher at the US Government Accountability Office (GAO), where he was a major contributor on various reports to US congressional committees. Ali is author of several books including *Natural Resources, Inequality and Conflict* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) with Lars-Erik Cederman; *Institutional Reforms, Governance, and Services Delivery in the Global South* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) with Shahjahan Bhuiyan; *Darfur Political Economy: A Quest for Development* (Routledge, 2014); *Darfur's Political Economy: A Quest for Development* (Routledge, 2014); and co-author with Christos Kollias of *Defense Spending, Natural Resources, and Conflict* (Routledge, 2017). Ali has also published articles in scholarly journals such as *Peace Research; Food Policy; Politics and Policy, Publius: The Journal of Federalism; and Defence and Peace Economics*. Ali's primary research interests include peace economics, economic inequality, defense spending, natural resources, and conflict. Ali received an MSc in economics from the University of Texas at Austin in 2000, and a PhD in economics and public policy from the University of Texas at Austin in 2004.

Aicha Elbasri

Researcher at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. Elbasri is a former UN official and has held various media and communications positions in the Department of Public Information in New York, the United Nations Development Programme in Sudan, and the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq. Elbasri was the spokesperson for the African Union-United Nations Mission in Darfur and a regional advisor in the UN Population Fund in Cairo. She received her PhD in French Literature from Savoy Mont Blanc University in France. Elbasri has published numerous peer-reviewed articles in addition to a book titled *L'Imaginaire Carcéral de Jean Genet, l'Harmattan, 1999*.

Ibrahim Fraihat

Associate Professor in international conflict resolution at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. He previously served as senior foreign policy fellow at the Brookings Institution, and taught conflict resolution at Georgetown University and George Washington University. His latest publications include *Iran and Saudi Arabia: Taming a Chaotic Conflict* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), and *Unfinished Revolutions: Yemen, Libya, and Tunisia after the Arab Spring* (Yale University Press, 2016). Fraihat has published extensively on Middle East politics, with articles appearing in *The New York Times, Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy, Huffington Post, Al Jazeera* and elsewhere. Fraihat received a doctorate in conflict analysis and resolution from George Mason University in 2006. He is the recipient of George Mason University's Distinguished Alumni Award (2014) for his achievements in the field of conflict resolution.

Mohammed Hemchi

Researcher at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies and Assistant Professor at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. He is a former lecturer at the Department of Political Science, University of Oum El Bouaghi, Algeria. He holds a PhD in International Relations from the University of Batna 1, Algeria. His publications include *Complexity Theory of International Relations: An Introduction* (2021), a translation of Emmanuel Wallerstein's *After Liberalism* (2022), and a translation of *Populism and Global Politics* (2022), in addition to numerous articles and chapters in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes.

Marwan Kaban

Director of the Political Studies Unit at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, President of the Gulf Studies Forum, and Director of the Diplomatic Studies and International Cooperation Program at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies. Previously, he served as Dean of the Faculty of International Relations and Diplomacy at Kalamoon University in Syria, a professor of international politics at Damascus University, a lecturer at the Department of International Politics at the University of Manchester, and a visiting scholar at Columbia University. He has worked as a consultant in international affairs in a number of Arab and regional research bodies and institutions. He has published several books and many research papers in Arabic and English on foreign policy and international relations, including: *Syrian Foreign Policy and the United States: From Bush to Obama* and *Iran-Iraq-Syria: Shocks and Rivalries in Triadic Pattern*.

Emad Kaddorah

Researcher and Head of the Editing department at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. He holds a PhD in International Relations and Middle East Studies and a Master's degree in Defence and Strategic Studies. His published books include *Turkish Foreign Policy: Orientations, Flexible Alliances, Power Politics* (ACRPS, 2021); *The Rise of the GCC States and Turkey: Convergent and Divergent Regional Agendas* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021).

Mehran Kamrava

Professor of Government at Georgetown University Qatar. He also directs the Iranian Studies Unit at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. Kamrava is the author of a number of journal articles and books, including, most recently, *A Dynastic History of Iran: From the Qajars to the Pahlavis* (Cambridge University Press, 2022); *Triumph and Despair: In Search of Iran's Islamic Republic* (Oxford University Press, 2022); *A Concise History of Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2020); *Troubled Waters: Insecurity in the Persian Gulf* (Cornell University Press, 2018); *Inside the Arab State* (Oxford University Press, 2018); *The Impossibility of Palestine: History, Geography, and the Road Ahead* (Yale University Press, 2016); *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics* (Cornell University Press, 2015); *The Modern Middle East: A Political History since the First World War*, 3rd ed. (University of California Press, 2013); and *Iran's Intellectual Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).