

IRAN

1400 BRIEF

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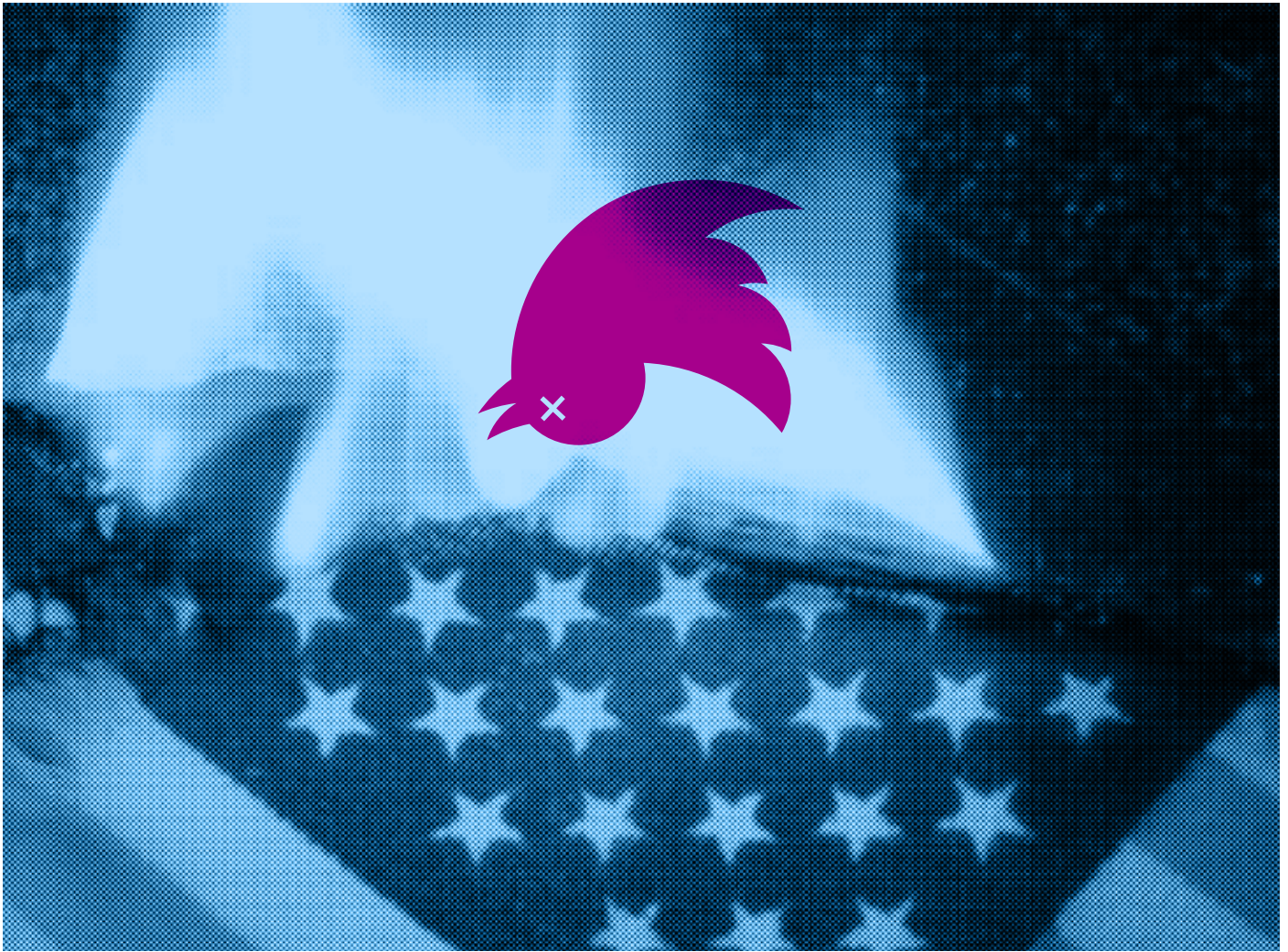
BEYOND THE HEADLINES

ایران



FRIEDRICH NAUMANN
STIFTUNG Für die Freiheit.
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SUMMARY

Last week, the second and third rounds of televised debates of presidential election ended without the expected results of the Iranian authorities. Polls have shown that the first debate was only watched by about 30% of Iranian adults. While the Islamic Republic's state-owned TV strives to increase voter turnout through convincing the Iranian people with its various programs, Iranian users have created the Twitter hashtag #IraniansBoycottElection to narrate a different story about the election and emphasize that many Iranians will refuse to cast a vote. In the international arena, while the Vienna talks will continue, the U.S. Secretary of State made clear that even with the revival of the nuclear deal hundreds of sanctions will remain against Tehran. Beyond these political issues, Iranians are still waiting for a reliable schedule for vaccinations. Above 70-year-olds who received their first dose of vaccine are waiting for the second dose, but the administration has said there is no supply yet.

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION



While many Iranians and media raised criticism against the first televised debate of the presidential election due to its random question format and the lack of policy substance in the candidates' answers, the second one was no different on these regards as well as to its ability to persuade the Iranian people to overcome their voter apathy. On June 10, the second TV debate was centered on candidates' views about various political, cultural and social issues, yet they again failed to provide any practical solutions to the problems and topics discussed. The candidates' core statements were concerned with a great variety of topics. **Frontrunner Ebrahim Raisi, for instance, said in a populist manner:** "Economic sources must be distributed on the basis of justice. If all capacities are distributed fairly, we will not see economic inequality." 'Eternal presidential candidate' and former IRGC commander Mohsen Rezaee, on his part, stated in a nationalist manner that "Our administration will restore hope to you [Iranians] and once again you will feel the victory." Former hardliner nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili remarked: "If you want to gain the trust of the people, the behavior

of the officials must be rectified. Wrong political culture in our administrative and executive structure is one of the obstacles for the country, which is not related to this or that faction or an administration; it is a pervasive issue." Turning to the ongoing JCPOA negotiations, reformist Mohsen Mehralizadeh demanded that "all the resources of the country and all the decision-makers must cooperate in all the institutions to bring about a successful result in the Vienna talks." In a more critical take, former Governor of the Central Bank of Iran and "moderate" frontrunner Abodlnaser Hemmati said: "I am against monopoly, which is equally bad in the economy and in the media, and it must be removed." On again another topic, Amir-Hossein Ghazizadeh-Hashemi remarked: "We plan to distribute the budget regionally and make it available to governors in provinces." And Alireza Zakani, turning to societal challenges, said: "One in five couples are infertile, and my first job is to insure them so that they can receive low-cost treatment to reach their wish."

The third TV debate on 12 June was, therefore, the last chance for candidates to influence Iranians. For obvious reasons, foreign policy has been one of the most important issues that the Iranian presidential candidates would have to discuss. However, as the Supreme Leader prohibited candidates to talk about foreign policy, the Islamic Republic's state-owned TV did not allow candidates to challenge each other on international issues. Therefore, the third debate was a continuation of stereotypical promises. In this debate, Amir-Hossein Ghazizadeh-Hashemi said that the problems that were raised in the past elections have even gotten worse and pledged to give a considerable role to the Iranian people in my administration. Mohsen Rezaee stated that Iran had made huge progress in defense and security aspects, but was unable to be successful in the economy, which is why his administration will attempt to create an economic revolution. On socio-economic grievances, Ebrahim Raisi lamented that "this rate of inflation is not acceptable. Why a family has to buy meat five times more expensive? Providing the people with a minimum standard of living, especially for the poor,

will be on the agenda." In the same vein, Alireza Zakani emphasized that "New subsidies will be paid from 200,000 to 300,000 tomans [nearly 10\$ monthly] to low-income people." Saeed Jalili attacked the Rouhani administration, saying that "The people's concern is that four years and eight years have passed, and the administration is not doing anything." Hemmati claimed that "Sanctions have undermined our economy and if they [hardliners] come to power, sanctions will intensify and new sanctions will be formed with a global consensus." On another account, Mehralizadeh said that "Media influence has shifted from Tehran to London, and 10% of people follow their news on Iranian television," against the backdrop that most Iranians prefer to follow the news on Persian-language satellite channels abroad.



PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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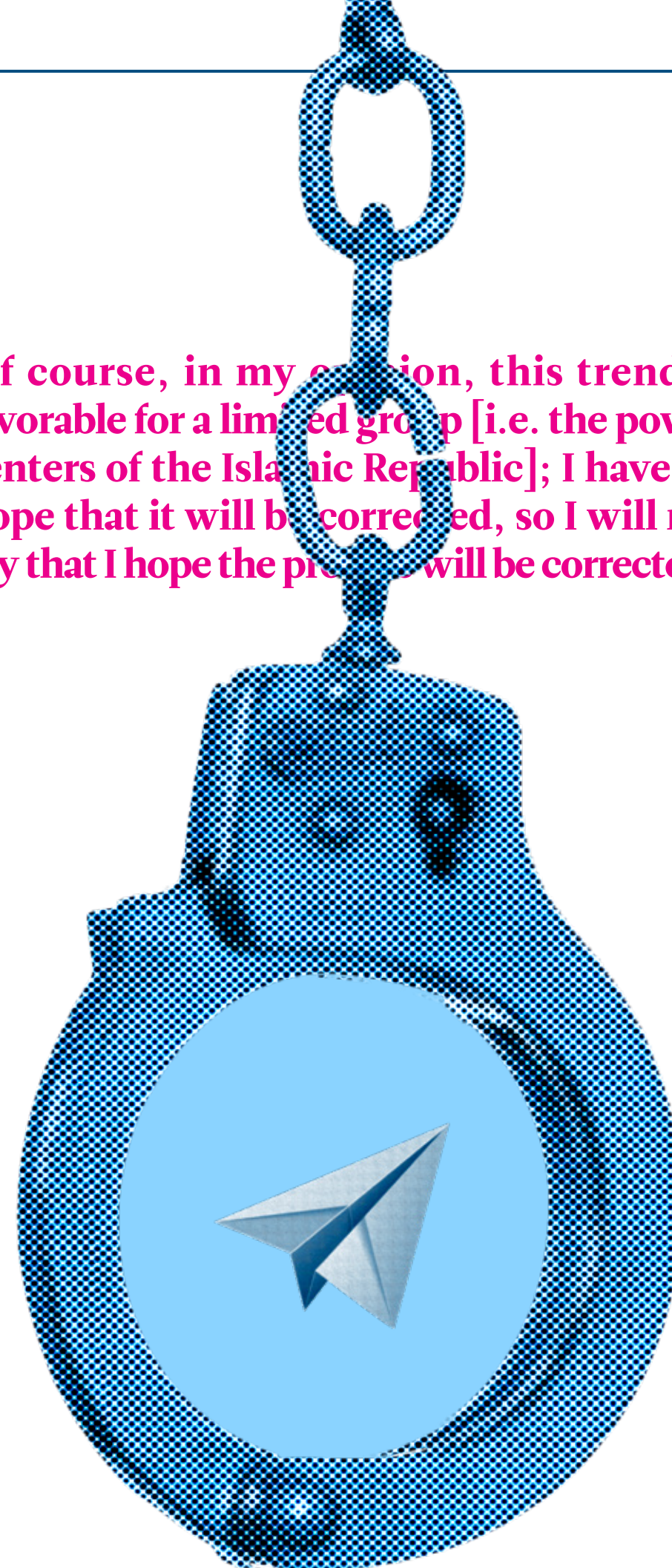
The second TV debate, too, had nothing to do with a “debate,” while some candidates even criticized the Islamic Republic’s state-owned TV’s handling of the TV debates. While usually in debates, each candidate must answer the same question, in Iran each candidate has to reply to a different question, which doesn’t allow the audience to compare the candidates’ standpoints. The televised debates were started in the run-up to the 2009 presidential election in which the candidates debated each other, facing the similar questions, and including controversial issues such as relations with Washington. At that time, the debates forged a polarized space for the election, which also contributed to the post-election protests known as the Green Movement. Since 2013, the structure of debates has been changed by Iran’s national broadcaster IRIB to be controlled by the moderator. Hemmati criticized that the current debate format cannot work for presidential candidates, instead the Iranian people should hear replies to all important questions. Even hardliner Saeed Jalili asked for a modification of the format of the debates.

However, these TV debates are very much similar to the upcoming election, as both of them are controlled by the Islamic Republic to reach a favorable result. In this vein, Mohammad-Javad Azari Jahromi, Minister of Information and Communications Technology in the Rouhani administration, [wrote](#) on his Telegram channel that the second debate was even worse than the first one, of such a low quality that some candidates raised criticism against them. He added, “Of course, in my opinion, this trend is favorable for a limited group [i.e. the power centers of the Islamic Republic]; I have no hope that it will be corrected, so I will not say that I hope the process will be corrected.”

Furthermore, the candidates’ remarks revealed their tactic to appeal to issues of concern to many Iranians. For instance, women’s rights and their equality in society is one of the repeated promises that the Iranian people heard from candidates at least since 1997 when Mohammad Khatami was elected as a reformist president. However, none of the presidents did improving the rights of women. After all, successive Iranian administrations, especially reformist or moderate ones, have used women as an instrument to increase their votes. In the last TV debate, Mehralizadeh, a reformist candidate, said that he will have three women for three ministries, and Hemmati, the moderate candidate, claimed that he will designate five women for his cabinet. In the meantime, Ghazizadeh-Hashemi, who belongs to the hardline camp, [claimed that all ministers of his cabinet will be women](#), while joking in response to the moderates’ repetitive claims to advance the cause of women. President Rouhani had promised to improve the status of women and choose them for at least three ministries in 2013 and 2017, but failed to keep its vows both times. Quite absurdly, [Rouhani has criticized](#) the current candidates on this issue, suggesting they would lie and play with people’s minds.

Notwithstanding, it seems that the current candidates are not as lucky as Rouhani was, due to the unwillingness of the bulk of Iranian people to cast a ballot this time around. According to [ISPA](#), the best-known polling institute in Iran, only 35% of Iranians watched the second televised debate. [Keyou](#), the other reliable polling institute, has released a report according to which 32% of people watched the debate and 44% believe that Raisi has won the debate.

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SOCIAL MEDIA: #IRANIANSBOYCOTTELECTIONS



While the Islamic Republic attempts to increase voter turnout by its dominance of Iran's media, social media has brought about an opportunity for the Iranian people to make their voices heard in the world. Clubhouse, Facebook, and particularly Twitter are used by Iranians to project a different narrative about the upcoming election. On the day of the second TV debate, Iranian users created a Twitter storm with the hashtag [#IraniansBoycottElections](#).

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Previously, voter turnout has usually been above 70% in Iran's presidential elections. However, the failure of the Rouhani administration in keeping its promises as well as the repression of two nationwide protests in 2018 and 2019 has changed the game for Iranian society, with many people intending not to vote in the upcoming presidential election. Social media has become their battleground to explain their reasons and persuade others to join the boycott. The recent

Twitter storm has been part of their efforts to raise their voice. Currently, [ISPA](#) has predicted that 60% of Iranians will refuse to vote. [Gamaan](#) (Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran), a polling institute administrated by an Iranian social scientists in the Netherlands, shows 75% of Iranians are reluctant to cast a ballot, with the survey conducted between May 27 and June 3.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Vaccination is still one of the most important challenges for Iranians in fighting against Covid-19. Above 70-year-olds received their first dose, but the country has no vaccine to provide for the second dose. Deputy Health Minister Ali-Reza Raeisi has **said** that by next week (June 14–20), they will provide enough doses to resume the vaccination program. However, Masoud Ghane'i, chairman of the Scientific Committee of the National Anti-Corona Headquarters of Iran, **has claimed** that people can receive Barekat, an Iranian vaccine, for the second dose, even if the first dose was Sinopharm, a Chinese vaccine.

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In Iran, U.S. and British vaccines are prohibited by the Supreme Leader. While Russian and Chinese vaccines are limited, Iran has announced that there are about five national vaccines that the country is working on. The Rouhani administration has claimed that until the end of the current Iranian year 1400 (i.e. March 2022), all people will receive vaccines, but many people raised questions about this allegation. Currently, none of the Iranian vaccines are ready to be injected. In early April, Iraj Harirchi, the Deputy Minister of Health and Medical Education, had **said**: “The first Iranian vaccine will be available in 40 days. The second vaccine [...] will be available to the public in about 70 days with a monthly circulation of 8 to 10 million doses.” However, more than 60 days after that interview, there is no Iranian vaccine available. Iran has had to endure four corona waves so far and based on official reports more than 81,000 have died, with the real number believed to be much higher.



INTERNATIONAL: JCPOA NEGOTIATIONS

While five rounds of negotiations have been held for reviving the nuclear deal, there is an optimistic view that the parties will reach the desired result in the sixth round. Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's representative in Vienna, [tweeted](#) about the next round of talks: “Will this be the last round? No one knows, but all negotiators hope so.” Meantime, the U.S. has decided to [lift some sanctions against Iran](#). Antony Blinken, U.S. Secretary of State, has stated that “The U.S. Treasury Department has lifted sanctions against three former Iranian officials and two companies that have previously participated in the purchase, ownership, sale, transportation or marketing of Iranian petrochemical products as a result of a change in the current situation or behavior of the parties. These actions demonstrate our commitment to lifting sanctions in the event of a change in the status or conduct of those subject to sanctions.” While some believe that this is a positive sign from the U.S., it should not be forgotten that in an interview he also said “[I would anticipate that](#), even in the event of a return to compliance with the JCPOA, hundreds of sanctions remain in place, including sanctions imposed by the Trump administration.”



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The revival of the nuclear deal still remains a puzzle. The shadow of Iran's presidential election alongside the complex and severe sanctions by the Trump administration against Tehran has brought about a complicated situation in which finding an acceptable solution for the main antagonists has become difficult, yet not impossible. Blinken's recent interview illustrated that President Rouhani, and more broadly the Islamic Republic, may be too optimistic about the Biden administration. It seems that Tehran believes that like Obama, Biden will turn a blind eye on Iran's controversial missile programs and regional policies. Although Washington is ready to rejoin the JCPOA, the other unsolved issues may not allow the Islamic Republic to gain full sanctions relief. No matter who will win the upcoming presidential election in Iran, due to the severe decline of Iran's economy, Tehran needs to reduce tensions with the U.S., so that the next administration will be able to take advantage of it to help alleviate the pain in the economic realm. Iranian officials are well aware that 2024, the year of the next U.S. presidential elections, will arrive sooner than it appears, which is why they believe they must now take advantage of the Biden administration's enthusiasm to revive the JCPOA. It is predictable that after June 18, the day of the elections in Iran, the Islamic Republic will probably show more flexibility for the revival of the nuclear deal, so as not to provide Rouhani with a last-minute success.



AUTHOR

Dr. Ali Fathollah-Nejad (Ph.D. SOAS) is a German-Iranian political scientist with a focus on Iran, the Middle East, the post-unipolar world order, and right-wing populism in Europe. He is the author of the much-acclaimed *Iran in an Emerging New World Order: From Ahmadinejad to Rouhani* (Palgrave Macmillan's Studies in Iranian Politics, May 2021) and of the *Iran 1400 Brief: Beyond the Headlines* weekly newsletter (Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom's Middle East and North Africa program). Based in Berlin, he is a Non-Resident Senior Research Fellow at the Afro-Middle East Centre (AMEC), South Africa's think-tank specialized on the Middle East, as well as affiliated researcher with *Centre d'Études de la Coopération Internationale et du Développement (CECID)* at *Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB)* as well as *Freie Universität (FU) Berlin's Center for Middle Eastern and North African Politics*. In 2020, he published two monographs: *The*

Islamic Republic of Iran Four Decades On: The 2017/18 Protests Amid a Triple Crisis (Brookings Analysis Paper) and *The Politics of Culture in Times of Rapprochement: European Cultural and Academic Exchange with Iran (2015–16)* (Wissenschaftsverlag WeltTrends).

Ali holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from the Department of Development Studies at SOAS (School of Oriental and African Studies) University of London and was a *post-doctoral Associate* with the Harvard Kennedy School's Iran Project. Also, he had been the in-house Iran expert at the Brookings Institution's Middle East center in Doha (BDC, 2017–20) and the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP, 2015–18).

He has taught globalization and development in the Middle East, contemporary Iran, the Arab Revolts and great-power politics at the University of Tübingen (as

Senior Lecturer in Middle East and Comparative Politics), in the Ph.D. program of Qatar University's Gulf Studies Center, at FU Berlin's Center for Middle Eastern and North African Politics, the University of Westminster, SOAS etc. Due to COVID-19, his Visiting Professorship at the Centre for International Studies of the University of Economics in Prague is postponed.

His about 200 analytical pieces in English, German, and French have been translated into a dozen languages. A frequent speaker at academic conferences and political forums, he regularly contributes to leading international media outlets in English, German, and French. Ali is fluent in German, French, English, and Persian, and reads Dutch.

<https://www.fathollah-nejad.eu/>





اتحاد جماهیر شوروی

U. S. S. R.

TURKEY

ترکیه

CASPIAN SEA

دریای مازندران

عراق

TEHRAN

KERMANSHAH

SAHRA

SHIRAZ

KUWAIT

عربستان سعودی

SAUDI ARABIA

نمایش علامات

LEGEND

- 1. SOIL WITH NO OR SLIGHT LIMITATIONS
1. No important problem except locally
- 2. SOIL WITH SLIGHT TO MODERATE LIMITATIONS
2. Limitations due to moderate deficit of water and undulating relief
- 3. SOILS WITH MODERATE TO SEVERE LIMITATIONS
3. Limitations due to moderate to strong deficit of water or shallow depth
- 4. SOILS WITH SEVERE TO VERY SEVERE LIMITATIONS
4. Limitations due to dissected relief, shallow depth and severe deficit of water
- 5. SOILS WITH ALMOST NO POTENTIALITY
5. Sand dunes
- 5. Solonchaks, salt marshes, saliferous and gypsiferous marls



Lake

SCALE 1: 2,500,000

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THE WORLD SOIL RESOURCES OFFICE
LAND AND WATER DEVELOPMENT DIVISION - FAO