



Beyond the Iran nuclear deal: predictable and unpredictable consequences in State, Society and Geopolitics

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ABSTRACT:

The Iran nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was signed on 14 July 2015. By curbing nuclear programme in exchange for sanctions relief, the JCPOA effectively shelved the prospect of war over the Iranian programme – a much desired and predictable outcome.

However, beyond the letter of the agreement, its spirit carried a number of expectations regarding Iran. In foreign affairs, it was expected to have a moderating effect on Tehran’s regional policies, heralding an age of détente in a regional geopolitics marked by tensions and uncompromising rivalries. In domestic affairs, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani was expected to embark on a path of reform, as promised during his campaign: While the deal’s economic dividends were to trickle down onto the population to improve its dire socio-economic situation, the space for Iran’s civil society and activism – hitherto very much constrained and in a state of siege – was to witness a considerable widening. Yet, on both of these accounts – the regional and domestic fronts – the actual results turned out to be contradicting the widely held expectations. The lecture will lay out why the JCPOA’s “unpredictable consequences” were indeed quite predictable, as witnessed in heightening tensions in the region and the Iranian Revolt in 2017/2018.

Readings:

Ali Fathollah-Nejad, ‘Iran’s Civil Society Grappling with a Triangular Dynamic’, in: Aarts, Paul & Cavatorta, Francesco (eds.) *Civil Society in Syria and Iran: Activism in Authoritarian Contexts*, Boulder, CO & London: Lynne Rienner, 2013, pp. 39–68.

Ali Fathollah-Nejad, 'German–Iranian Relations after the Nuclear Deal: Geopolitical and Economic Dimensions', *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Winter 2016), pp. 59–75.

Ali Fathollah-Nejad, 'Rouhani's Neoliberal Doctrine Has Failed Iran', Washington, DC: Middle East Institute, 18 May 2017.

Ali Fathollah-Nejad, 'The Iranian–Saudi Hegemonic Rivalry', *Iran Matters* (a special research initiative of the Harvard Kennedy School Belfer Center's Iran Project, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA), 25 Oct. 2017.

Ali Fathollah-Nejad, 'Causes behind Iran's Protests: A Preliminary Account', *Al Jazeera English*, 6 Jan. 2018.

Asef Bayat, 'The Fire That Fueled the Iran Protests', *The Atlantic* (online), 27 Jan. 2018.

Amir Ahmadi Arian & Rahman Bouzari, What Sanctions Mean to Iranians, *New York Times*, 10 May 2018.