

UNESCO, UN Human Rights Office call on Houthis to 'immediately' release staff members

Wed, 2022-05-04 18:07

LONDON: UNESCO and the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) called on Wednesday for the Houthis to release two of their staff members.

"As families across Yemen gather to mark Eid Al-Fitr this year, UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet urge the immediate release of two of their staff members who have been detained since early November last year in Sana'a," the two organizations said in a joint statement.

"Despite repeated assurances, as early as last November, by the Ansar Allah movement (also called the Houthis) that the two staff members would be immediately released, their whereabouts remain unknown," it added.

UNESCO and the UN Human Rights Office said they were both "deeply concerned" about the well-being of the staff members.

"In this context, the UN Human Rights Office and UNESCO urge the (Houthis) to ensure the well-being of the two concerned staff members and to release them without any further delay," the statement said.

"Under international law, UN staff are accorded privileges and immunities, which are essential to the proper discharge of their official functions."



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Yemen Minister: Houthi militia raid WFP warehouse, kidnap 2 UN staff members
Secretary-General 'deeply concerned' about two UN staff members detained by Houthis in Sanaa

[Arab nations to mull best prosecutorial practices at top European conference](#)

Wed, 2022-05-04 15:57

ROME: Delegates from Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia will attend the European Conference of Prosecutors in Palermo on May 5 and 6 organized by the Council of Europe and the Italian government, to discuss several critical

issues including the independence of the judiciary and fighting transnational crimes.

The conference will host representatives from all the COE's member states. Delegates from Canada, the Holy See, Kazakhstan and the US will also take part in the event.

The symposium will focus on the independence and accountability of public prosecutors, co-operation in the investigation of transnational crimes, including a focus on offences related to the abuse of the environment, and the misuse of information technology.

"We are particularly interested in hearing the contributions from our colleagues from Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia so that we can share and implement with them best practices especially on protection of human rights," Antonio Balsamo, president of the tribunal of Palermo and judge of the Constitutional Court of Kosovo, told Arab News.

The plenary session will be held in the "Bunker Courtroom" built in the capital of Sicily especially to host Mafia trials. It will be chaired by COE Secretary General Marija Pejčinović Burić.

Italian president Sergio Mattarella will attend the event. The interior and justice ministers of Italy Luciana Lamorgese and Marta Cartabia will moderate working sessions.

Recognizing the essential role of the public prosecutor in the criminal justice system of a state governed by the rule of law, the COE Committee of Ministers decided in July 2005 to institutionalize the regular organization of conferences of prosecutors general of Europe and established the Consultative Council of European Prosecutors.

This consultative body to the Committee of Ministers is composed of high-level prosecutors of all member states.

The conference has the task of preparing opinions for the ministerial committee on issues related to the prosecution service, to promote the implementation of COE recommendations, and to collect information about the functioning of such services in Europe and neighboring countries, including North African states.

During the conference, the 30th anniversary of the killing of top anti-Mafia prosecutors Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino will be commemorated.

Falcone and Borsellino were killed by the Mob with car bombs in Palermo, the capital of Sicily, in May and July 1992 respectively.



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Sicilian judge Sergio Mattarella elected Italian president
Italian president extends 'warmest wishes' for Eid Al-Fitr

[Years after Daesh defeat, northern Iraq struggles to rebuild](#)

Author:

Tue, 2022-05-03 23:25

HABASH, Iraq: In Iraq, "maku" means "nothing," and father-of-five Issa Al-Zamzoum says "maku" a lot: no electricity, no home, no rebuilding and no job. Eight years after heavy fighting between Daesh terrorists and the army, the reconstruction of his war-ravaged village in northern Iraq is at a standstill.

"There is nothing here, no electricity," 42-year-old Zamzoum sighed. "Even work, there is none."

Zamzoum lives with his wife and family in Habash, some 180 kilometers (110

miles) north of the capital Baghdad, a village dotted with dozens of bomb-blasted houses still ruined from intense fighting in 2014.

Part of their roof, which caved in during the bombardment, still lies in crumbling and bullet-scarred wreckage.

In one room, a hen watches over her chicks. In another, filthy mattresses are piled up against the wall.

The building does not even belong to Zamzoum: his own home was left uninhabitable.

While the Baghdad government eventually celebrated military "victory" over Daesh in December 2017, the scale of destruction was immense.

"Reconstruction? We do not see it," Zamzoum said gloomily. "Nothing has happened since the war."

Habash paid a heavy price during Daesh's siege of Amerli, a town less than 10 kilometers away.

In 2014, the jihadists, who controlled the key northern city of Mosul and surrounding areas, moved south to attack Amerli, using surrounding settlements such as Habash as bases for their assault.

The combined forces of the Iraqi army, Shiite militias and Kurdish forces launched a counterattack to break the siege with gruelling street fighting, and Daesh forces were pushed out.

But for residents of the already hard-hit area, it was not the end of their suffering.

According to Human Rights Watch, after the siege "pro-government militias and volunteer fighters as well as Iraqi security forces raided Sunni villages and neighborhoods" surrounding Amerli, including Habash.

HRW used satellite imagery to map "heavy smoke plumes of building fires, likely from arson attacks" in the village.

Today, nearly 20,000 people displaced by the conflict need aid in the area, according to the Norwegian Refugee Council, an aid agency.

"Humanitarian needs are significant," the NRC said.

As well as basic needs like clean water and electricity, even obtaining identity papers is a challenge for many.

"Many people have been displaced across governorates and face major barriers to travel to obtain civil documents," the NRC said.

"Others face security clearance issues related to perceived affiliation with the Islamic State" group, it added.

Like most of the residents of Habash, Zamzoum's neighbor Abdelkarim Nouri is a Sunni Muslim.

In Shiite-majority Iraq, Sunnis have sometimes been viewed with distrust, suspected of being complicit in past support of the extremists.

Daesh jihadists follow a radical interpretation of Sunni beliefs.

"Our life is a shame," Nouri said. "I don't have a job. I have five sheep, and they are the ones who keep me alive."

He said he had appealed to his member of parliament for support, but nothing had changed.

Nouri does not mention religion or talk of sectarianism – a deeply sensitive topic in a country where tens of thousands of people died during bloody inter-religious conflict in 2006-2008.

Now, over four years since the end of Daesh's self-proclaimed "caliphate" in Iraq, many Sunnis say they are victims of harassment and discrimination.

A US State Department report last year cited concerns among Sunni officials

that “government-affiliated Shia (Shiite) militia continued to forcibly displace Sunnis.”

The report quoted officials describing “random arrests of Sunnis in areas north of Baghdad” and detentions made on suspicion of Daesh links.

In Salaheddin province, where Habash is located, officials speak of “security risks” which are delaying reconstruction – without mentioning Daesh jihadists by name.

While Habash is under government control, the militants still operate just 15 kilometers further north.

On the road that leads to the village of Bir Ahmed, forces of the Hashed Al-Shaabi – a Shiite-led former paramilitary coalition now integrated into Iraq’s state security apparatus – stand guard.

“The situation in Bir Ahmed is beyond our control and that of the army,” a senior officer said. “You can get in, but I can’t guarantee you can get out.”



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Iraq yet again hit by dust storm
19th century Iraq church holds first Mass since Daesh defeat

Transit and 'torture': Rescued migrants recount Libya horrors

Author:

Tue, 2022-05-03 23:11

TRIPOLI: On a medical ship off the Italian coast, rescued migrants are coloring in a map of Africa, where many started their perilous journeys toward Europe.

The countries are brightly colored in yellow, green, purple and red. Libya however, a common transit country from sub-Saharan Africa into Italy, is black.

For many of the migrants, the country evokes painful memories: Abuse, torture and trafficking.

Libya has been singled out as a dangerous country for migrants, and a UN report last year revealed "crimes against humanity" inflicted on the most vulnerable.

For some aboard the Geo Barents ship run by medical charity Doctors Without Borders, the dangers are all too familiar.

"I was tied up, beaten, electrocuted," said 25-year-old Eritrean refugee John, who gave only one name.

He explained how he fled authoritarian Eritrea in 2018, crossing through Ethiopia and Sudan before arriving in the southeastern Libyan city of Al Kufra four years ago.

"I was abducted from Al Kufra and sold to traffickers. And then to others," he said.

He eventually escaped, boarding a dinghy headed for Italy, from which he was rescued in April by the Geo Barents.

He like others has received medical care on board the ship, where migrants also spend time doing activities like the map coloring exercise.

John colors Libya in black to signify the pain he experienced during his time there.

"There is no government in this country," he said. "No laws."

John is one of the tens of thousands of migrants who attempt the dangerous and often deadly crossing from Libya to Italy every year. More than 31,000 made the journey by sea last year, according to UN figures.

Many stream to Libya from elsewhere in Africa, boarding precarious vessels to cross the Mediterranean toward Italy.

AFP could not independently verify details of John's account, but MSF doctors on the Geo Barents say many migrants arrive with chilling reminders of their time in Libya.

"We see a lot of them with actual physical evidence of violence, injuries that cause long-term problems," said MSF doctor Mohammed Fadlalla.

"We commonly see bullet wounds, burns, evidence of electrocution, lots of beatings."

Many migrants land in the hands of traffickers in Libya who demand hefty sums in exchange for their freedom. Attempts to escape can be a death sentence.

The Geo Barents helps those lucky enough to flee, trawling the waters of the central Mediterranean near Italy and Libya in search of migrant boats.

It stops in Italian or international waters – never Libyan waters – and takes in migrants in need, sometimes for as long as two weeks, before they are sent to Italy.

Fadlalla said medics on the ship often use scars or bruises to piece together what happened to the migrants – a kaleidoscope of trauma used to compile accounts of human rights violations.

Others need extensive mental and emotional support.

"A lot of these survivors who have suffered this torture have psychological difficulties as well," said Fadlalla.

"Fear, difficulty sleeping, flashbacks, anxiety, depression."

Libya has gained a notorious reputation for migrants on the dangerous route to Europe.

A UN fact-finding mission last year found some of the abuses faced by migrants there could be classified as "crimes against humanity."

"Violations against migrants are committed on a large scale by state and non-state actors, with a high level of organization and with the encouragement of the state," one of the UN experts, Chaloka Beyani, wrote.

Lawyer Jelja Sane, who specializes in refugee law and human rights, condemned European governments for intercepting migrant boats coming from Libya, urging them to offer safe and legal routes.

"The evidence of the plight of refugees and migrants in Libya can no longer be ignored," said Sane, from London's Doughty Street Chambers.

And for those who have been tortured, access to "full rehabilitation services, as required by international law," should be offered, she said.

Senegalese migrant Eladj Ndiaye still bears the evidence of such abuse.

The 19-year-old has scars on his scalp and under his lip from when he was

beaten with a glass bottle by his captors. They held him for several weeks in Libya, he said.

“Everywhere in Libya you are robbed, you are beaten,” he added.

Despite the known risks – and mounting evidence of abuses – migrants continue to trek toward Europe.

Eritrean refugee John knew what he could face, but went anyway.

“We know it’s dangerous. But we want to join Italy,” he said.



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UN experts seek to verify mass graves for migrants in Libya
Greek police rescue 64 migrants marooned on border islet

[Washington faces a moment of reckoning](#)

as Iran nuclear talks reach an impasse

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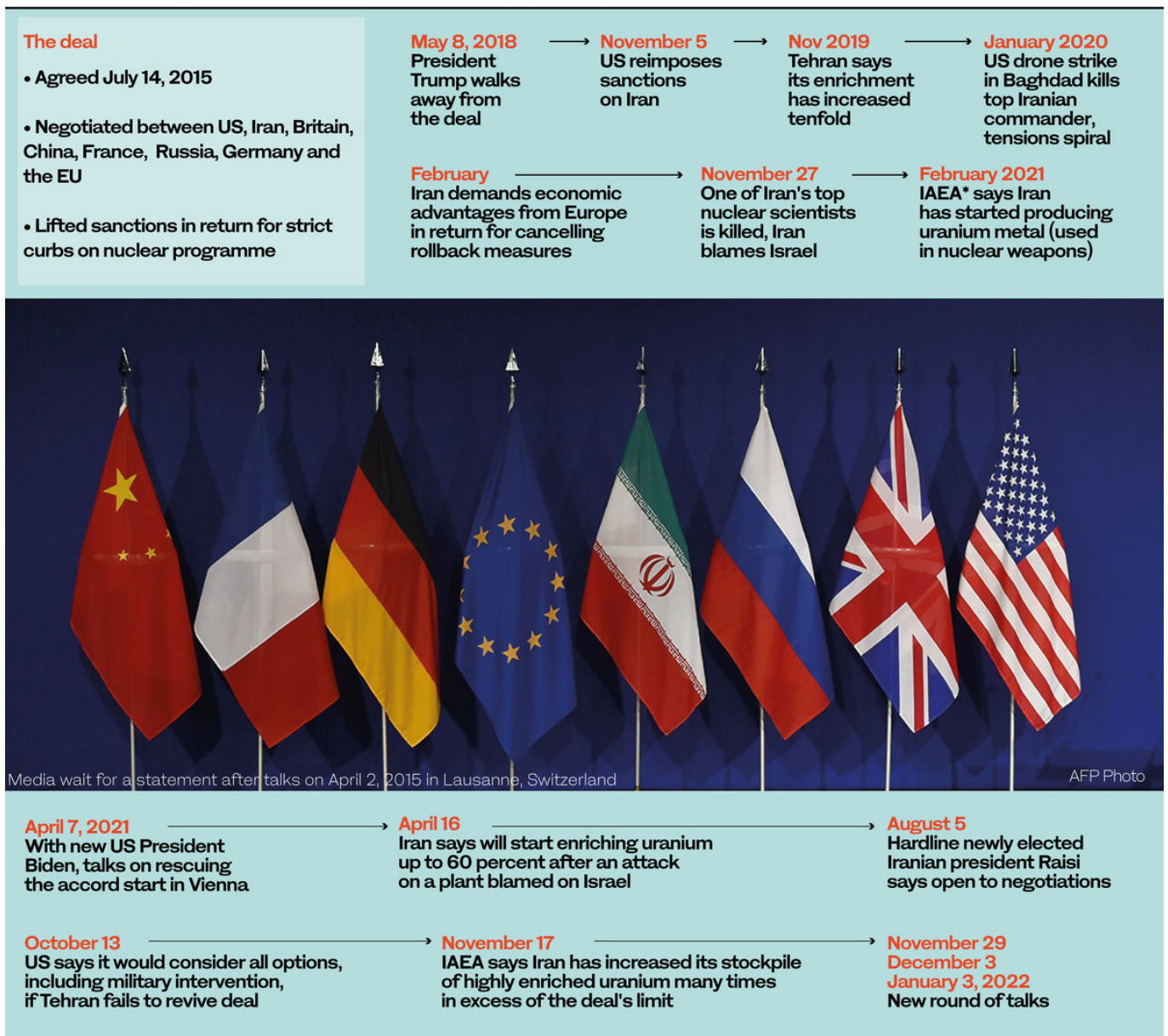
WASHINGTON: White House officials believe Iran is inching closer to becoming a nuclear threshold power and could be just weeks away from producing both sufficient fissile material and the necessary technology to weaponize and deliver a nuclear payload.

Reaching the milestone of a significantly shorter breakout period to building a nuclear bomb would give Iran a great deal of leverage and bargaining power in future negotiations even as it seeks hegemony over the Middle East in accordance with its grand strategy.

Despite a concerted effort by the Biden administration to coax Iran to return to the 2015 nuclear deal, indirect negotiations between the two sides have hit a roadblock owing to Tehran's insistence that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps be removed from the US list of designated foreign terrorist organizations.

Jason Brodsky, policy director at United Against Nuclear Iran, an advocacy group based in Washington, believes Iran has been free to push ahead with its nuclear program because Western powers have lacked the commitment to set firm conditions.

TIMELINE OF IRAN NUCLEAR ACCORD



Source: *International Atomic Energy Agency

ARABNEWS

“On advanced centrifuge research and production, Iran has made significant progress over the last year – particularly after it started enriching uranium to 60 percent, and in its production of uranium metal,” Brodsky told Arab News.

“This all happened because the Iranians tested the international community’s red lines and found out that what once were thought to be red lines were not really red lines.”

If recent Middle East history is any guide, the Obama-era nuclear deal with Iran, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, did not slake the thirst of the regime in Tehran for nuclear arms or regional dominance.

US President Joe Biden hopes to reverse his predecessor’s decision in 2018 to withdraw the US from the 2015 nuclear accord. The Trump administration believed the deal did little to prevent Tehran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, stem its ballistic missile program, or halt its malign activities

across the Middle East.

According to Brodsky, even after the sobering experience of crippling sanctions slapped on the Iranian economy by the Trump administration following the withdrawal from the JCPOA, the regime in Tehran still harbors nuclear ambitions.

Opinion

This section contains relevant reference points, placed in (Opinion field)

“Iran will continue along this path,” he said. “Iran is increasing its capabilities in the production of centrifuges, with production lines and capacities being expanded, according to recent remarks from the International Atomic Energy Agency director-general. This can be seen at Natanz as well as a separate, new location in Esfahan.”

Negotiations in Vienna between Iran, the US and the other original JCPOA co-signatories – China, France, Germany, Russia and the UK, along with the EU – have stalled. In Brodsky’s view, Tehran is deliberately playing for time in the hope of strengthening its bargaining position.

“The Iranians for over a year have been dragging out the negotiations to advance their nuclear program so that it produces a shorter and weaker deal for the West while notching a stronger agreement for itself in the form of non-nuclear sanctions relief,” he said.

While the international community is preoccupied with the conflict in Ukraine and the threat of an armed confrontation between Russia and NATO, a moment of reckoning looms when Washington will have to decide whether the talks with Iran have reached a dead end.

Andrea Stricker, a research fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, believes Iran is rapidly approaching a nuclear milestone that cannot be dealt with at a later date through a watered-down deal.

“It is concerning that Tehran is close to amassing enriched uranium sufficient for a nuclear weapon but Washington’s intention appears to be to scare recipients of this message into supporting a revived Iran deal,” she told Arab News.



Tehran is deliberately playing for time in the hope of strengthening its bargaining position. (AFP)

“Iran has nearly enough 60-percent-enriched uranium for one atomic bomb, which does not require further enrichment to weapons-grade. And, overall, it has enough enriched uranium for at least four weapons.”

She said the solution to the problem is not an accord “that provides billions of dollars in sanctions relief for Tehran and allows it to expand its uranium enrichment program starting in 2024.”

According to Stricker, the deal offered by Biden could mean no restrictions on Iranian advanced centrifuge development from 2024 onward, thereby permitting a significantly shorter breakout time to a bomb than under the original JCPOA.

“Under the terms of the reported deal, Iran’s breakout time would only extend to around four months, not at least seven months, as in 2015,” she said.

URANIUM ENRICHMENT

The concentration levels required for civil and military purposes

- Nuclear energy produced from uranium 235, which represents only 0.7% of natural uranium; the rest is uranium 238



Civil use: majority in nuclear power stations using uranium enriched with U-235 to 3.5 to 5%

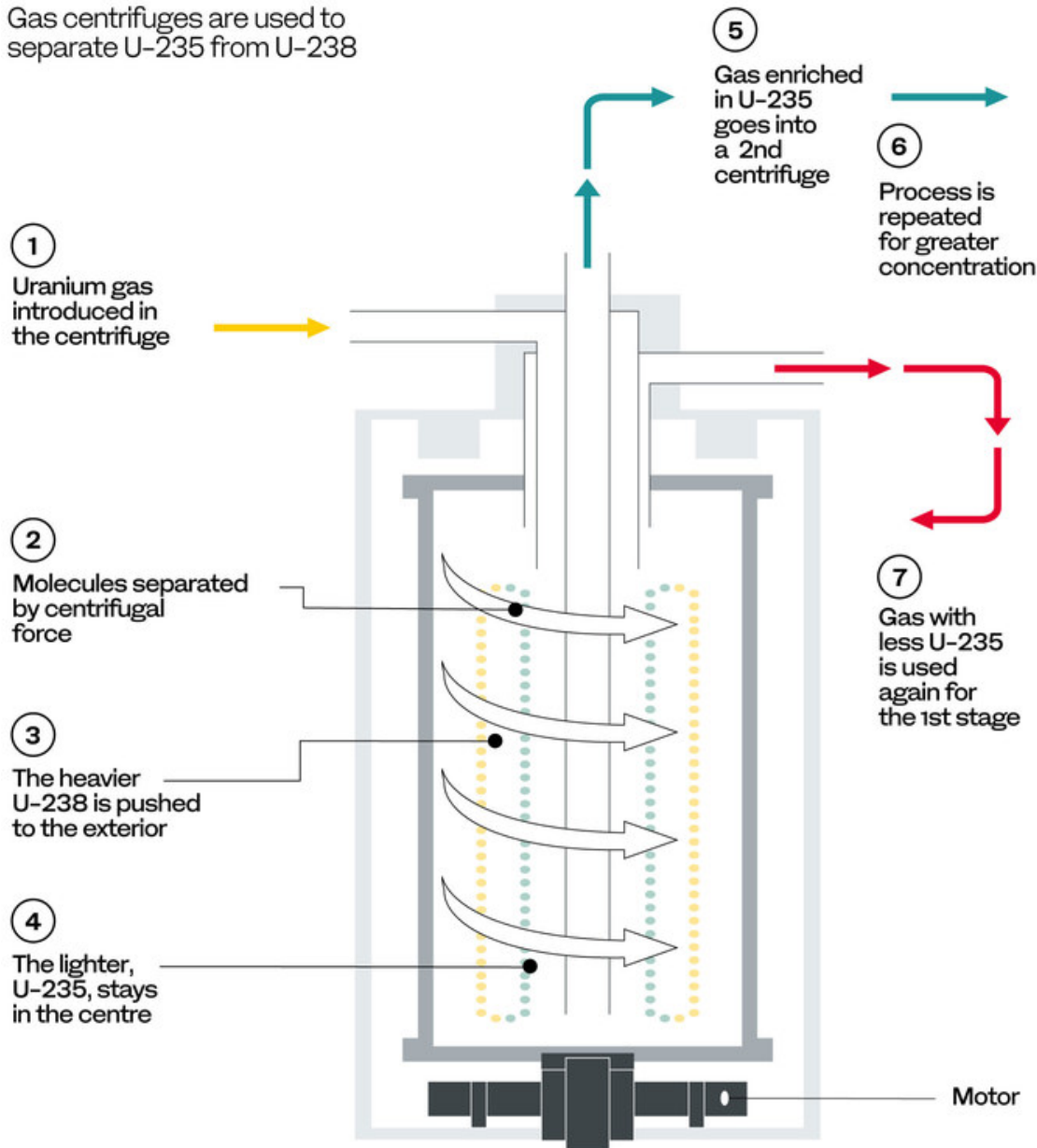
- The enrichment process increases the proportion of U-235 by separating it from U-238



Military use: concentration of at least 90% U-235 necessary to produce nuclear weapons

GAS CENTRIFUGE

Gas centrifuges are used to separate U-235 from U-238



“Iran is permitted to add 400 centrifuges per year to its stockpile of advanced centrifuges starting in 2024. By the end of the accord, Iran would be on the threshold of nuclear weapons and unstoppable if it chose to break out.”

Wary of a preemptive assault by its enemies, Iran appears to be placing its most advanced centrifuges deeper underground, beyond the reach of international monitors, saboteurs and missile strikes.

This strategy is reinforcing latent suspicions that Iran’s centrifuge production, enrichment research and production efforts are serving military ends rather than strictly civilian purposes, as the regime claims.

“Iran is restarting advanced centrifuge production at two underground facilities that Tehran relocated to make the sites impervious to sabotage or military strikes,” said Stricker.

“Theoretically, Iran could use around 650 IR-6 centrifuges, for example, and existing stocks of enriched uranium to make weapons-grade uranium very quickly. These two centrifuge-manufacturing facilities are not currently under IAEA monitoring, so the world has no assurance that Iran is not diverting centrifuges for a clandestine enrichment plant.”



Reaching the milestone of a significantly shorter breakout period to building a nuclear bomb would give Iran a great deal of leverage. (AFP)

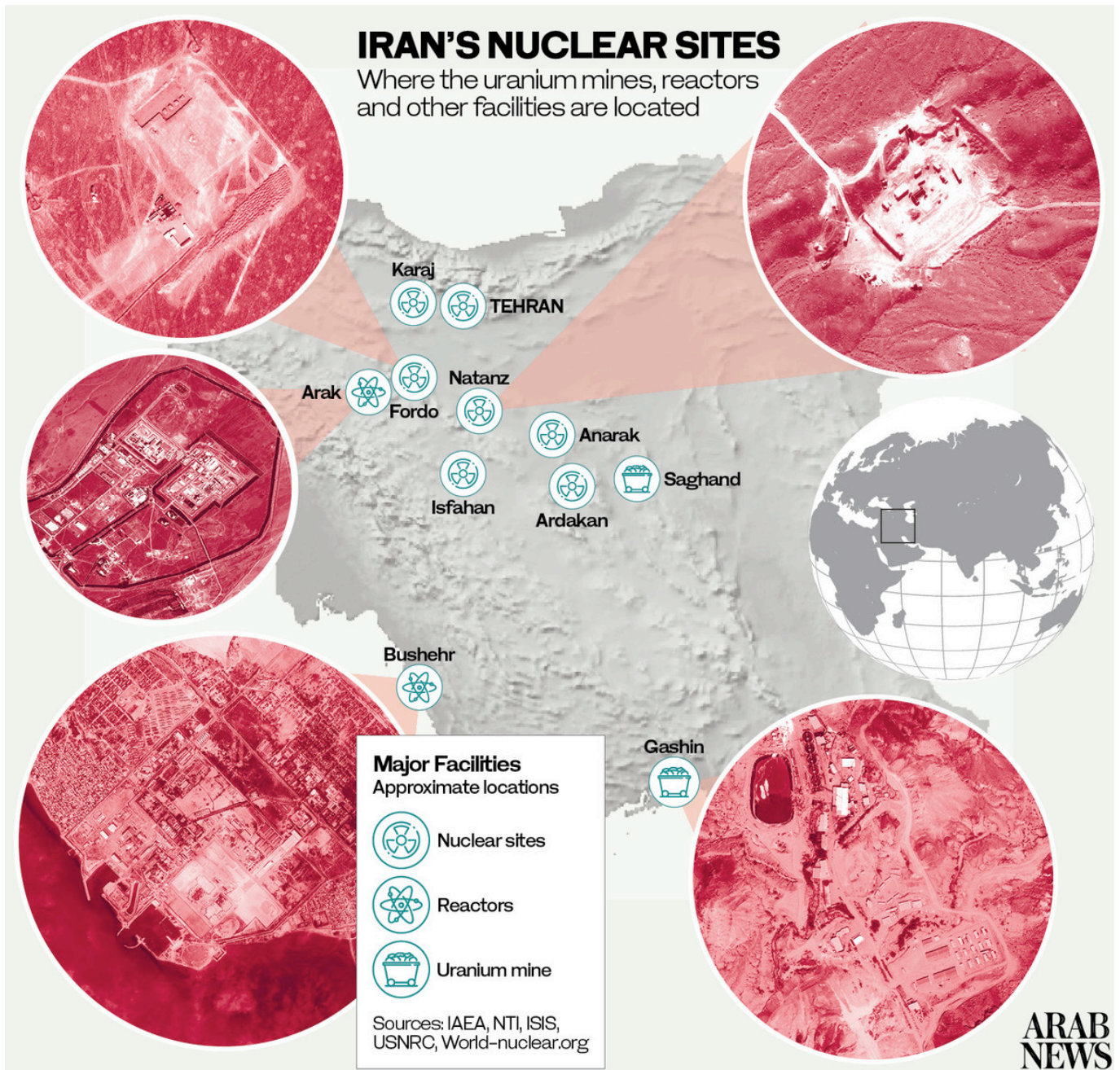
Among the advocates of a Biden nuclear deal that gives in to Iran’s demand for rescinding the IRGC’s terrorist designation is Ben Rhodes, who was deputy national security adviser to former President Barack Obama. Rhodes recently

stated publicly that the terror designation is an overly burdensome roadblock to a deal that would benefit US national security interests. The facts, however, tell a different story.

According to data compiled by the Jewish Institute for National Security of America, Iranian aggression – specifically missile strikes, naval confrontations, cyberattacks, kidnappings and weapons tests – has doubled since Biden took office. There is no proof that the expressed desire of the Biden team to revive the nuclear deal and offer significant incentives on sanctions and nuclear inspections has moderated the behavior of the Iranian regime or curbed its proclivity for violence, it adds.

“There are alternative policy options available to the Biden administration: A combination of sanctions, aggressive sanctions enforcement, diplomatic isolation, covert action, deterrence, and a credible military option is one,” said Brodsky.

“There is now greater realignment with the E3 (group of France, Germany and Italy) on Iran policy, and Washington should use this dynamic to move on from the JCPOA.”



Critics of the Biden administration’s policy on Iran say that maintaining the foreign terrorist organization, or FTO, designation of the IRGC benefits US interests that go beyond the purview of a nuclear deal with Iran.

“There is significant bipartisan opposition to removing the foreign terrorist organization designation,” said Brodsky.

“It would cause a firestorm if the Biden administration, in a midterm-election year, delisted the IRGC as an FTO. And, in the end, I have questions as to how much political capital the Biden administration wants to expend on resuscitating this deal.”

Stricker believes the Iranian leadership is hedging its bets in the expectation that US negotiators will eventually blink, in no small part thanks to the fact that Iran has not faced any real penalties for evading sanctions or for its clandestine nuclear advances.



The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, did not slake the thirst of the regime in Tehran for nuclear arms or regional dominance. (AFP)

“The IAEA has not been able to complete its investigation into whether Iran’s program maintains military dimensions, which is why the deal’s proposition of loosening restrictions on the enrichment side over time makes no sense,” she said.

In her view, if the Biden administration wants to halt its tumbling poll ratings, it needs to set much firmer conditions for Iran to follow in exchange for sanctions relief and a revived nuclear deal.

“A policy reset requires scrapping any legalization of Iran’s enrichment program and requiring full transparency and IAEA access,” Stricker said. “Tehran should prove to the world that the nuclear program is fully peaceful before it gets relief from sanctions.”

By all accounts, the likelihood of Iran opting for the straight and narrow is slim to none. On Monday, Ali Bahadori Jahromi, an Iranian government spokesman, told state media that Iran intends to continue the negotiations for a nuclear deal until its “national interests are fully and comprehensively protected.”

The Biden administration therefore might have to quickly reevaluate the utility of offering Iran practically everything it is asking for on a silver platter and, instead, begin charting a new policy course that takes into

account the hard reality of the regime's unabated nuclear-weapons development.



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[Editor's Choice](#)

West 'has given up hope' of revived Iran nuclear deal, say expert analysts
Iran blames US for delays to revive nuclear deal