

IRAN TRACKER

Situation Report Week of March 16, 2015

Will congressional moves actually push Iran towards nuclear concessions?

J. Matthew McInnis, Tara Beeny, Mehrdad Moarefian

Outlook

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's and other political figures' recent venting about Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech to Congress and [an open letter](#) from 47 Republican senators asserting the US congressional role in any final nuclear agreement comes as no surprise. Iranian negotiators may try to use the senators' move to extract more from the US in the nuclear talks. But it is more likely the letter could push Tehran towards greater concessions, as reaching a deal sooner will mitigate further US congressional actions. On the security front, the growing transfer of advanced weapons from Iran to Iraq to support Baghdad's campaign against ISIS further demonstrates Tehran's commitment to becoming the dominant security guarantor in Iraq at the expense of US and allied interests. In Yemen, Iran's rhetoric continues to advance their al Houthi allies' legitimacy in Sana'a while supporting a negotiated settlement with all the major Yemeni political actors. Tehran's actions, including a recent bilateral economic agreement directly with the al Houthis, will likely have the opposite effect instead and help drive polarization between factions in north and south Yemen.

Iran still content with emerging nuclear deal

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei [sharply criticized](#) the United States in a March 12 speech before Iran's Assembly of Experts and reinforced his support for Iran's negotiating team. Khamenei called recent US statements "ludicrous, cheap, and

disgusting," and termed the [March 9 letter](#) from 47 Republican senators "the ultimate collapse of political ethics" in America. On March 15, Expediency Council Chair Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani [likened](#) Iran's domestic critics of the nuclear deal to the 47 Republican senators, whom he said were circumventing negotiations and warmongering. This did not stop National Security and Foreign Policy Parliamentary Commission Chairman Alaeddin Boroujerdi from [stating](#), "the likelihood of a [nuclear] agreement has increased." [A chorus](#) of similarly [optimistic statements](#) about the [on-going P5+1 negotiations](#) in Switzerland from other Iranian leaders indicate the regime anticipates a deal will be reached and is eager to conclude the talks.

Iranian arms escalate Iraqi firepower in Tikrit

Iranian T-72 tanks [were spotted](#) last week near the Iraqi city of Tikrit and the town of Samarra. Reports indicate the tanks are operated by members of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), which, if true, would [constitute a violation](#) of the arms embargo established by United Nations Security Council Resolution 1747. Iran also [reportedly deployed](#) Fajr-5 artillery rockets and Fateh-110 missiles for the Tikrit campaign, but it is uncertain whether Iraqi forces have used either weapon so far in the fight. Iran and Iraq previously signed a \$195 million dollar [arms deal](#) in February 2014 and a December 2014 [Memorandum of Understanding](#). While Iran's Chief of the Armed Forces, General Staff Major General Hassan Firouzabadi, [said](#) Iraq-

is are responsible for their own security, the head of Iraq's Islamic Supreme Council Ammar Hakim and Head of the Iraqi Badr Organization Hadi al Amiri [praised](#) Iran's efforts against ISIS. Hadi al Amiri [claimed](#) that without Iranian advisors and IRGC Qods Force Commander Qassem Soleimani "all of Iraq would be occupied by ISIS right now." On March 11, IRGC Commander Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari discussed [the Tikrit offensive](#) before Iran's Assembly of Experts, and IRGC Qods Force Commander Major General Qassem Soleimani [was sighted in](#) Samarra and Tikrit.

Iran's 'common solutions' are al Houthi solutions

Following a trip to Doha, Qatar, Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani [called upon](#) regional states to hold "constructive talks for common solutions," to resolve the conflict in Yemen, and argued that "accusing one side and supporting another does not remedy the problem." Paradoxically, Larijani and Iran's Arab and African Affairs Deputy to the Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian, [criticized](#) former Yemeni President Abdu Rabbu Mansour Hadi for his decision to resign the presidency and [reestablish himself](#) in the de facto southern capitol of Aden. On March 12, Tehran also [signed](#) several direct economic agreements with the al Houthis.

J. Matthew McInnis is a resident fellow at the [American Enterprise Institute](#). This report was produced in cooperation with the Iran Team of the [Critical Threats Project](#).