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Abstracts

According to the Iranian electoral law, all Iranian citizen has right to nominate themselves. A total of 1636 persons registered for the presidential election, which 1499 are men and 137 women.

The main conservative coalition challenging President Hassan Rouhani will elect its unity candidate at a later date. The Popular Front of Islamic Revolution Forces will permit all five finalists to register to run in the presidential candidates. The Front will decide on a single candidate at a later date. The five candidates are Astan Quds Razavi Head Hojjat ol Eslam Ebrahim Raisi, Tehran Mayor Mohammad Ghalibaf, Former Minister of Education under President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad Hamid Reza Haji Babaei, Former Parliamentarian Mehrdad Bazrpash, and former Parliamentarian Alireza Zakani.

Hojjat ol Eslam Ebrahim Raisi is emerging as conservatives groups' best chance at a unity candidate as the main conservative coalition challenging President Hassan Rouhani struggles to unify.

The Popular Front of Islamic Revolution Forces, the conservative coalition dedicated to introducing a single conservative challenger to President Rouhani, continues to decline. The Front was forced to revamp its list of five finalists after Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation Head Parviz Fattah stated that he does not intend to run. The Front also delayed its decision regarding the ???number of candidates??? it will register in the presidential elections to April 12. Another influential hardline group, the Steadfastness Front, also reiterated its opposition to the Popular Front. This move underscores the ongoing division within Iran's conservative-hardline camp.

A member of the Steadfastness Front nonetheless acknowledged that his group may back the same candidate as the Popular Front. Raisi may be waiting to see whether the larger conservative-hardline camp, and not just one group, unifies around him. Other

conservative candidates' willingness to drop out of the race to support Raisi or another unity candidate remains one of the most significant factors in the outcome of the May 19 elections.

Iranian officials did not articulate any significant strategic change stemming from the U.S. airstrikes on Syria's Shayrat Airbase, but continued to condemn them. A number of senior officials, including President Hassan Rouhani and Armed Forces General Staff Head IRGC Major General Mohammad Hossein Bagheri, promised that the airstrikes would not impact Iran and Russia's cooperation in the fight against terrorism. Rouhani, Judiciary Head Ayatollah Sadeq Amoli Larijani, and others also called for an independent fact-finding mission to investigate the chemical weapons attack in Khan Sheikhoun. Officials have not expressed publicly any major changes to Iran's strategy or policies as a result of the airstrikes.

Iran's reaction to the U.S. airstrikes on Syria's Shayrat Airbase reflects its larger effort to delegitimize the U.S. as a partner in the fight against terrorism. Iranian officials framed the U.S. airstrikes as contrary to international efforts to defeat terrorism in Syria. Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif accused the U.S. of "fighting on the same side" as al Qaeda and ISIS. Hossein Amir Abdollahian, the international affairs advisor to Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani, stated that the airstrikes show that the fight against ISIS is "still" not America's top priority.

Officials continued to push the regime's narrative that its coalition with Russia and Syria is the true champion for countering terrorism in the region. Head of Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Alaeddin Boroujerdi stressed that Iran's response to the airstrikes will occur within the framework of its relationship with Russia and Syria, and stated that "Russia and Iran will not sit quietly in the face of acts which are contrary to the region's interests." Officials' reactions did not indicate that Iran intends to escalate immediately in response to the U.S. airstrikes.

The U.S. Treasury designated the Tehran Prisons Organization and Sohrab Soleimani, a senior official within the organization, for human rights abuses at Evin Prison. The Tehran Prisons Organization operates Evin Prison. Sohrab Soleimani is the brother of IRGC Quds Force Commander Major General Qassem Soleimani.

Aseman Airlines finalized a deal to purchase 30 aircraft from Boeing as part of Iran's continued efforts to revitalize its commercial aircraft fleet. The agreement is reportedly worth \$3 billion, and permits Aseman Airlines the right to buy an additional 30 737 aircraft in the future. Boeing is scheduled to deliver the aircraft to Iran by 2022. Iranian

media outlets reported that Boeing will deliver 5-10 aircraft by 2019. The airline's CEO, Hossein Alaie, is a former IRGC commander with longstanding ties to the current command echelon of the IRGC. The U.S. government must approve the deal for it to move forward.

A state-run airline, Iran Air, purchased 100 aircraft from Airbus and 80 aircraft from Boeing in December 2016. Open source evidence indicates that Iran Air and other Iranian commercial airlines continue to carry out flights in support of the Syrian regime. The nuclear deal lifted restrictions on the sale of commercial aircraft to Iran Air, despite the fact that U.S. Treasury designations implicated the airline in flying cargo to Syria in support of the IRGC and the Syrian government.

President Hassan Rouhani downplayed the recent tension between himself and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Rouhani dismissed allegations that there is ???distance??? between his administration and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Rouhani stressed that his administration ???is subject to??? Khamenei and is ???proud??? of its ???solidarity and unity??? with the Supreme Leader. Rouhani has worked to de-escalate the tensions between himself and Khamenei over the former's implementation of the Resistance Economy doctrine ahead of the May presidential elections. Rouhani has maintained a positive relationship with Khamenei during his presidency, however. Rouhani's continued relationship with Khamenei is essential to the survival of his presidency.

President Hassan Rouhani and Judiciary Head Sadegh Amoli Larijani clashed over the Judiciary's impact on attracting foreign investment to Iran. President Rouhani argued that the Judiciary is impeding foreign investment in Iran by creating a negative security environment for investors. Larijani denied Rouhani's allegations and defended the Judiciary. He stated that the Judiciary ???not only does not prevent healthy investment??? but also facilitates healthy investment by dealing decisively with corruption.??? Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and others have pushed back on President Rouhani's emphasis on attracting foreign investment in Iran. Rouhani and Larijani have clashed over a number of issues during Rouhani's presidency, especially over freedom of expression and the press. Rouhani has been under particular pressure to defend his economic record leading up to the May presidential elections, however, following intense criticism from Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and other officials.

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