



## Spotlight on Iran



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### Support for Syria comes to Facebook: supporters of Iran's military involvement in Syria increase their social network presence

In the past several months, elements affiliated with the Iranian regime have considerably stepped up their Facebook activity in a public relations move to spread a message of support for the Iranian military involvement in Syria.

The activity is gathering momentum as more and more reports are being released by Iranian media on the broad support of the Qods Force-led Revolutionary Guards for the Syrian regime and on Revolutionary Guards fighters killed in battles with the rebel forces in Syria. Those fighters are usually referred to as “defenders of Zainab’s Mosque”, referring to a mosque situated in a southern suburb of Damascus which in Shi’ite tradition is the final resting place of Imam Ali’s daughter.

As of this writing, there are approximately ten active Facebook pages dedicated to the fighting in Syria from the perspective of the Iranian fighters taking part in it. The content posted on the social network includes:



Photo : Ali Khara

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1. Reports on the fighting between the Syrian regime and its allies from Iran and Arab countries on one hand and the rebels on the other, with an emphasis on the achievements made by the regime and its supporters.
2. Anti-rebel PR content focusing on the rebels' involvement in terrorist activities against civilians.
3. PR content that includes press reports and cartoons against countries allegedly supporting the rebels, mainly the United States, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Israel.
4. Details on commanders fighting for the rebel army.
5. Reports (mostly photographs) on fighters from Iran, Hezbollah, and Arab countries involved in the fighting against the rebels.
6. Extensive reports on losses incurred by fighters from Iran, Hezbollah, and Arab countries fighting alongside the Syrian regime in combat with the rebels. The reports include information on the fighters' death circumstances, eulogies, and details on their funeral ceremonies.
7. Religious Islamic content accompanied by photographs of Zainab's Mosque in Damascus and Shi'ite-oriented encouragement for the fighters.

In addition to the activity of the supporters of the Iranian involvement in Syria, its critics, too, maintain a presence on the social network, albeit on a smaller scale. The focus of their activity is a Facebook page titled "Solidarity with the Syrian people: Iranians support the Syrian popular revolution" (<https://www.facebook.com/Iran.Syria>), which contains reports on the Syrian regime's activity against the rebels that emphasize its use of chemical weapons and the casualties sustained by innocent civilians, as well as reports on the achievements made by the rebels in their fight against the regime.

The dissemination of content dedicated to the fighting in Syria by Iranian elements fits into the growing cyberspace presence of regime supporters. In recent years, activists of the Revolutionary Guards' Basij force known as "soft war soldiers" have created hundreds of websites, blogs, and Facebook pages with the objective of spreading online content that reflects the views of the regime.

The extensive public relations activity on the social network in support of the Iranian military involvement in Syria may be indicative of a deliberate policy pursued by the Iranian regime and the Revolutionary Guards to get Iranian public opinion support for the ongoing fighting in Syria and curb any possible criticism that might be provoked by the increasing reports on the losses suffered by the Iranian forces sent to fight alongside the Syrian regime. It is not inconceivable that the increased scope of the PR effort on the military involvement in Syria since July 2013 also reflects concerns

harbored by the Revolutionary Guards over a possible change in the policy of the new Rowhani-led administration with regard to such involvement.

## Appendix: Facebook pages dedicated to the Iranian fighting in Syria

Iranians in Support of Syria's Government and People ( الايرانيون يدعمون سوريا حكومة ) (وشعباً), [https://www.facebook.com/HmbstgyBaMrdmSwryhAlayranywnYdmwnSwryaHkwmtWShbaa?hc\\_location=stream](https://www.facebook.com/HmbstgyBaMrdmSwryhAlayranywnYdmwnSwryaHkwmtWShbaa?hc_location=stream). Launched on September 26, 2012; number of followers: approximately 4,200.



Zainab Martyrs of the Revolutionary Guards' Qods Force ( شهدای زینبی نیروی قدس سپاه الشهداء ) (الزینبیون راية القدس وحرس الثورة),

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%B2%DB%8C%D9%86%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%B1%D9%88%DB%8C-%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%B3-%D8%B3%D9%BE%D8%A7%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B2%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%A8%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%B3-%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%B1%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AB%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%A9/188893981286775>.

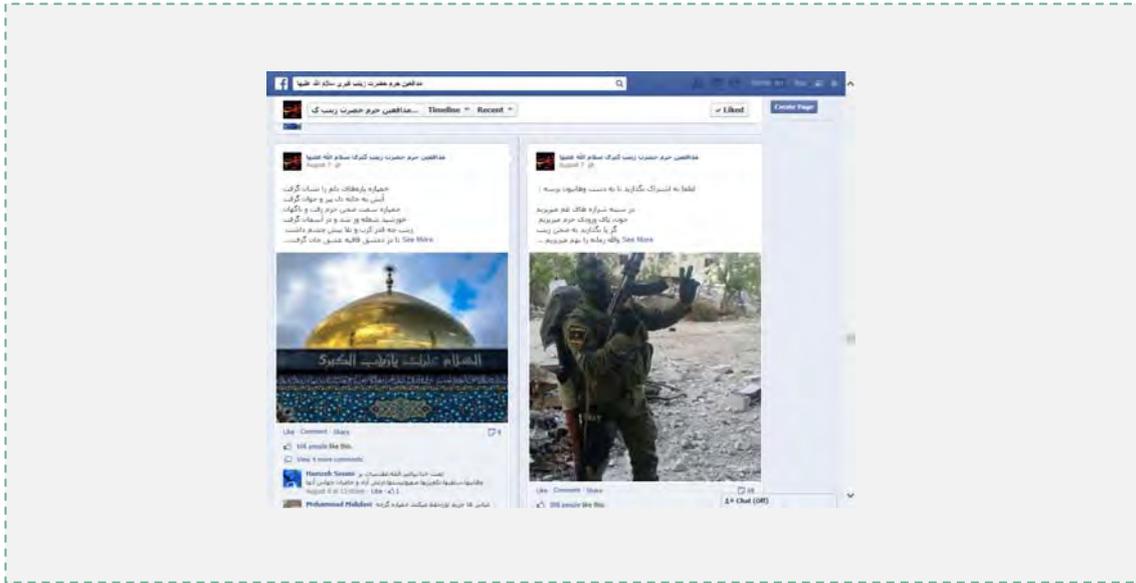
Launched on July 23, 2013; number of followers: approximately 550.



Census of Shi'ites for Presence and Defense of the Imams' Mosque in Syria (سردشماری شیعیان برای حضور و دفاع از حرم زینب علیها السلام), <https://www.facebook.com/shiayaan>. The page was launched on November 19, 2010, before the civil war in Syria, but changed its direction in the wake of the war. Number of followers: approximately 1,640.



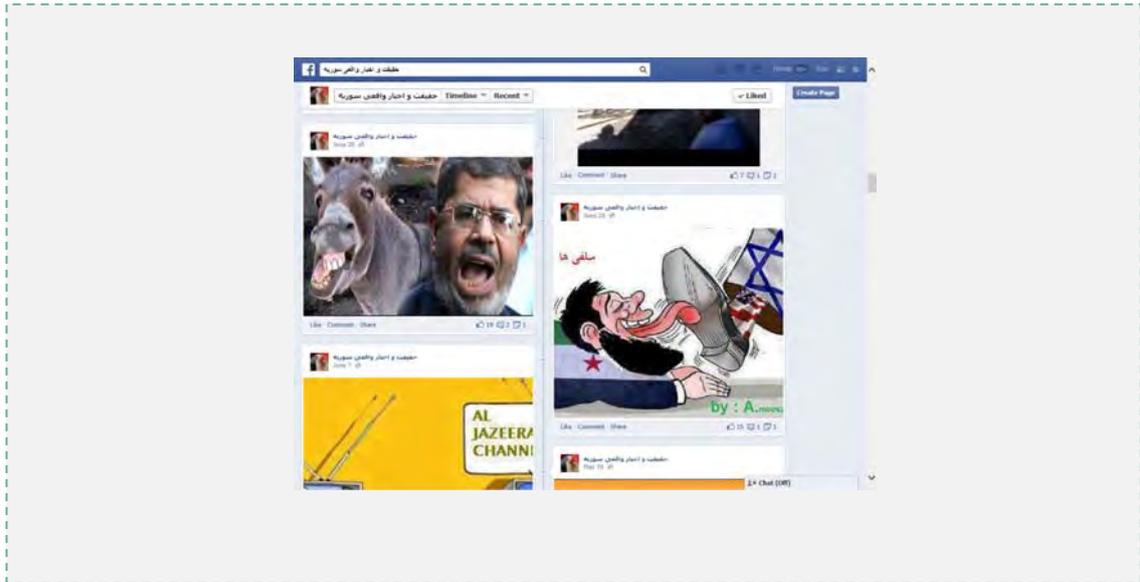
Defenders of Zainab's Mosque, Peace be Upon Her (مدافعین حرم حضرت زینب کبری سلام الله), <https://www.facebook.com/defendersofzainab>. Launched on July 30, 2013; number of followers: approximately 2,780.



We Want to Go to Syria to Defend Zainab's Mosque ( برای دفاع از حرم حضرت زینب میخوایم بریم )  
 (سوریه), [https://www.facebook.com/fadaiyane.hazrate.zeinab?hc\\_location=stream](https://www.facebook.com/fadaiyane.hazrate.zeinab?hc_location=stream).  
 Launched on June 28, 2013; number of followers: approximately 4,400.



The Truth and True Reports on Syria (حقیقت و اخبار واقعی سوریه)  
 (سوریه), <https://www.facebook.com/akhbare.vaghie.suria>. Launched on July 10, 2012; number  
 of followers: approximately 670.



Campaign to Support Syria (كـمـپـيـن حـامـيـان سـوريـه), <https://www.facebook.com/support.Siria>.  
Launched on July 31, 2012; number of followers: approximately 1,010.

