



The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center
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Spotlight on Iran

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Highlights of the week

- ✓ Iran rejected the American State Department's annual report on terrorism that revealed Iran has continued its support for terrorism in the last year, claiming the report was politically motivated and an expression of America's double standards regarding the war on terrorism.
- ✓ Hossein Hamedani, a senior IRGC official, described Syria as "Iran's strategic depth," and claimed the objective of Syria's enemies was to ensure Israel's security through decreasing Iran's regional influence and weakening Hezbollah.
- ✓ Three Iranian fighters were killed when a mine exploded on the Damascus-Daraa road in Syria.
- ✓ Iran and Syria agreed to broaden cooperation on energy and the fight against terrorism during visits carried out by Syrian interior and energy ministers in Tehran.
- ✓ Qods Force commander Qasem Soleimani remains in Iraq; another Iranian was killed by ISIS in Ramadi. Two YouTube videos documented the use of advanced Iranian technology in intelligence gathering by Hezbollah Battalions operating in Iraq under Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards' aegis.
- ✓ Iraqi prime minister paid a visit to Iran, Iranian deputy foreign minister paid a visit to Iraqi Kurdistan and a delegation of Sunni tribal chiefs from the Al-Anbar region paid a visit to Iran to request Iranian aid to combat ISIS.

Spotlight on Iran is a new, bimonthly Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center bulletin intended to shed light on Iran's activities to establish its influence in the Middle East and beyond. It is based on reports in the Iranian media. Spotlight on Iran is written for the ITIC by Dr. Raz Zimmt, a research fellow in the Alliance Center for Iranian Studies in Tel Aviv University and a research fellow at the Forum for Regional Thinking. His fields of expertise include the politics, society, foreign policy and social networks in the Islamic Republic.

Iranian Responses to the American State Department Annual Report on Terrorism

■ On June 19 the American State Department issued its annual Country Reports on Terrorism for 2014, revealing that during the past year Iran continued its support for terrorism. According to the report on State Sponsors of Terrorism, Iran "continued its terrorist-related activity in 2014, including support for Palestinian terrorist groups in Gaza, Lebanese Hezbollah and various groups in Iraq and throughout the Middle East."¹

■ Iran rejected the report and criticized it harshly. Ms. Marzieh Afkham, an Iranian Foreign Ministry's spokeswoman, promptly rejected the report's findings, claiming the accusations were politically motivated and an expression of America's double standards regarding the war on terrorism. Afkham claimed the United States did not take serious, assertive action against terrorism, while during the past thirty years Iran had been terrorism's greatest victim (Fars News, June 20, 2015).

■ Hamid Reza Moqaddam-Far, advisor to IRGC for media and cultural affairs, responded to the report by saying that the people of Iraq, Bahrain, Syria, Lebanon and the other states in the region had a positive opinion of the IRGC. He claimed the United States had been hostile to the IRGC since its establishment after the Islamic Revolution. Following the regional "Islamic awakening" and the American defeat in Iraq, the United States had been representing the IRGC and its Qods Force as a terrorist network. The IRGC and the Qods Force, he claimed, were the symbols of the Islamic Revolution and its mechanism for exporting the revolution and Islamic awakening, but Western propaganda represented them as terrorist groups, while the people of the region regarded them as helpful.

■ Moqaddam-Far rejected the claim² that Iran supported Shi'ites, giving as examples its support for the Sunni Palestinians and non-Shi'ite groups in Iraq. He claimed that the United States' designation of Hezbollah as a terrorist organization was unacceptable to world public opinion and to most Lebanese, who regarded Hezbollah as defending Lebanon and Syria. Iran, he claimed, supported the Syrian government, which had been legally elected by Syrian citizens, against Sunni terrorist groups supported by the West and several countries in the region (Mehr News, June 22, 2015).

Senior Iranian Officials' Statements on Iran's Regional Involvement

¹ <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2014/239407.htm>

² The State Department report makes no such claim.

■ Interviewed by Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV, Ali Shamkhani, the secretary of the Supreme Council for National Security, spoke about Iran's activity in Syria and Iraq. He reiterated Iran's official position that Iranian presence in both countries had been requested by their governments and that they had only advisors on the ground, whose activity was based on Iran's experience in fighting terrorism. Shamkhani said the Syrian regime and its people had been opposing terrorism for the past five years, and the resistance was capable of fighting terrorism and defending the country. Iran, he said, stood beside and would continue to stand beside Syria, and would collaborate with other countries to find a political resolution for the crisis. He stressed that Iran objected to dividing Syria and Iraq along ethnic or religious lines and that the fight against terrorism demanded the collaboration of all ethnic and religious groups (KhabarOnline, June 15, 2015).

■ Alaeddin Boroujerdi, chairman of the Majlis [Iranian parliament] Committee for Foreign Policy and National Security, said that Iran's invitation to participate in the Geneva conference to discuss the situation in Syria proved that its enemies had reached the conclusion that regional problems could not be solved without Iran. He said the regional situation would change without Iran's presence, which showed its power (Mehr News, June 12, 2015).



■ Mohammad-Ali Asoudi, senior advisor to the Supreme Leader's representative in the IRGC, referring to the support Iran gave Syria and Iraq, said it was intended "to prevent the Zionists from striking the resistance axis." Asoudi claimed Israel supported the extremist Sunni organizations, including ISIS, in order to exploit them in its struggle against the resistance front (www.ycr.ir, June 21, 2015).

Iranian Intervention in Syria

- In a speech delivered at a meeting of Basij-members university lecturers in Hamedan Province, Hossein Hamedani, senior official in the IRGC and commander of its Imam Hossein headquarters, described Syria as Iran's "strategic depth." He said Syria had become an arena where its enemies, among them the United States, the European countries and Arab states, fought its friends, Russia and China. The official objective of the enemy camp, he said, was to lessen Iran's influence in the region, weaken Hezbollah and change it from a military organization to a political organization, all for the sake of ensuring Israel's security. Hamedani claimed Iran was the nation most esteemed in Syria and Iraq today (Tasnim News, June 22, 2015).
- Last week Mohammad Ibrahim al-Shaa'r, Syrian minister of the interior, paid a visit to Tehran, during which the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding about expanding cooperation in the fields of security, the fight against terrorism and smuggling.



- At a joint press conference held by al-Shaa'r and Abdolreza Rahmani-Fazli, the Iranian minister of the interior, Rahmani-Fazli said that the two had discussed ways to fight terrorism, especially ISIS, which was supported, he said, by the West and Israel, and endangered the stability of the countries of Islam. During the visit it was decided that Iranian, Syrian and Iraqi representatives would meet in Baghdad where they would discuss mutual collaboration in the fight against terrorism (ISNA, June 22, 2015).
- Hossein Ashtari, commander of Iran's internal security forces, met with al-Shaa'r and expressed readiness to increase the security collaboration between the two

countries. He said that in view of the Iranian police force's capabilities, especially those related to fighting organized crime and terrorism, and to investigating cyber crimes, the Iranian security forces were prepared for every type of cooperation with Syria (IBNA, June 23, 2015).

■ Imad Mohammad Deeb Khamis, Syrian minister of energy, paid a visit to Tehran in order to discuss increased cooperation with Iranian electricity and energy companies. He met with representatives of Iranian companies operating in Syria, and invited more Iranian companies to invest in water and electricity projects in Syria (Tasnim News, June 17, 2015). Khamis said the two countries intended to sign an agreement for cooperation in the field of electricity that would increase the investments of Iranian companies in Syria. Khamis met with Hamid Chitchian, the Iranian minister of energy, who said Iran was planning to increase the activity of private Iranian companies in Syria. He said the Syrian government was planning to invest €15 billion in electricity and energy industries by 2020, and that it was an opportunity for Iranian franchisees and investors to expand their activity in Syrian industry (Alef, June 17, 2015).

■ Alaeddin Boroujerdi chairman of the Majlis Committee for Foreign Policy and National Security, met with political activists in Syria visiting in Tehran. He told them that Iran would stand beside the Syrian government and its people and would not spare any effort to support them in the fight against terrorism (Mehr News, June 16, 2015).

■ The bodies of Ali Amraei, Hassan Ghafari and Mohammad Hamidi, Iranian fighters killed in Syria, were returned to Iran last week. The three were killed when a mine exploded on the Damascus-Daraa road (Tasnim News, June 24, 2015). They were buried in Iran on June 25th. Five members of Fatemiyoun Brigade (Afghan volunteers fighting in Syria alongside IRGC) who were killed recently in Syria and another IRGC member who was killed from wounds he incurred last month were buried the same day.



Hassan Ghafari, one of the three Iranians killed, with Qasem Soleimani, IRGC commander

Iranian Intervention in Iraq

- Morteza Savari, an Iranian from the city of Susangerd in Khuzestan Province, was killed in Ramadi in Iraq (Defa Press, June 14, 2015).



- On June 17, 2015, Haider al-Abadi, Iraqi prime minister, paid a visit to Tehran during which he met with senior Iranian officials to discuss the situation in Iraq. He was accompanied by Abu-Mahdi al-Muhandis, commander of the Hezbollah Battalions militia operating under Iranian aegis. Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei told al-Abadi that the presence of terrorists in Iraq was temporary. Khamenei stressed the need to preserve Iraq's political and national unity, and praised the courage of the

young Iraqis fighting terrorism. He said that Iran supported the unity of all Iraq's "revolutionary fighting groups" and would continue supporting the Iraqi government and its people (Entekhab, June 17, 2015).



- Meeting with Prime Minister al-Abadi, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said Iran stood by Iraq in its war against ISIS. He called the ties between Iran and Iraq "strategic" and said that expanding them in every area served not only the interests of both countries but also those of all the countries in the region (Tasnim News, June 17, 2015).
- On June 20, 2015, Masoud Jazayeri, deputy chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces, claimed the necessary measures were being taken to liberate Iraq's Nineveh and Al-Anbar Provinces; he did not specify which measures. He said the liberation of Iraq from terrorists could take some time because of the support they received from the Arab states, Israel, the United States and Britain, but that there was not doubt the Iraqi fighters would be victorious (www.ycr.ir, June 20, 2015).
- Hassan Qashqavi, deputy Iranian foreign minister for consular and parliamentary affairs, paid a visit to Iraqi Kurdistan and met with senior local officials, among them Jalal Talabani, former Iraqi president; Yousef Mohammad, chairman of the Kurdistan regional parliament; and Asu Fereydoun, governor of Suleymaniye Province. They discussed Iran's economic ties with Iraqi Kurdistan and ways to expand anti-ISIS collaboration. Yousef Mohammad thanked Iran for its support in the Kurds' fight against ISIS and called for stronger security collaboration between Tehran and Baghdad (Fars and IRNA, June 15, 2015).

- A video posted to YouTube on June 13, 2015 by the pro-Iranian TV station Al-Etejah documented the use of an Iranian unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), apparently an Ababil 3, by the Hezbollah Battalions, one of the Shi'ite militias operating in Iraq under IRGC aegis.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZKioGk3bSqw>

- A video posted to YouTube on June 18, 2015 also documented the use of advanced technology to gather intelligence, including SIGINT capabilities, and of UAVs by Hezbollah Battalions in the Baiji region.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3A4zvasoir4>

Iranian UAVs have been used against ISIS in Iraq since the fall of Mosul to ISIS in June 2014. In June 2014 *The New York Times* reported that according to American sources, Iran had begun secretly operating UAVs in Iraq from the Baghdad airport, and that an intelligence unit had been deployed to intercept communications. Last year ISIS claimed it had downed a number of Iranian UAVs in the skies over Iraq.

■ During the past two weeks the social networks have continually posted pictures of Qasem Soleimani, IRGC Qods Force commander, indicating his continued presence in Iraq.



■ A delegation of the Sunni tribal chiefs from Al-Anbar Province recently paid a visit to Iran to request Iranian aid to combat ISIS. According to Sheikh Ashour al-Mahlawi, chief of the al-Boumahal al-Tarabasha tribe, the delegation was composed of 14 tribal chiefs. During the visit, which had been coordinated with the central government in Baghdad, the tribal chiefs asked Iran for financial aid and weapons. Iran granted their request but on condition it be sent through the Iraqi government (Fars News, June 23, 2015). A video recently posted on Facebook documented Qasem Soleimani, meeting with Sunni tribal chiefs in Al-Anbar Province in an attempt to convince them to fight against ISIS alongside the Shi'ite militias. The recent reports indicate Iran's efforts to prove that its activities in Iraq are not limited to supporting only Shi'ites.

Iranian Intervention in Yemen

■ On June 16 an emergency meeting of the foreign ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was held in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to discuss developments in Yemen. Hossein Amir Abdollahian, deputy Iranian foreign minister, who represented

Iran at the meeting, stressed the need to preserve Yemen's unity and sovereignty, and called for the immediate end of the Saudi attack and for Saudi Arabia to lift its aerial and naval siege of Yemen. He claimed that if the military attack continued it would increase extremism and terrorism, and endanger the entire region. He called on OIC members to fulfill their "Islamic and humanitarian commitment" and help the Yemeni people. Abdollahian was absent during the speech given by Yemen's president in exile, Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi (IRNA, June 16, 2015).

■ An exhibition opened in Tehran called "Yemen's Endurance." It was organized by the Noandish Association of the Children of the Martyrs and the Faithful. According to the organizers, its objective was to present the "crimes" Saudi Arabia committed against the Yemenis. The exhibition's opening ceremony was attended by members of the Majlis, clerics, representatives from Yemen and families of Iranian victims of the war (Mashreq News, June 16, 2015).



■ On June 16, the first international cartoon competition devoted to Yemen ended in Tehran. More than 200 cartoonists from 33 countries entered the competition, which was organized by the Andisheh Cultural Center, and whose objective was to "present the crimes committed by Saudi Arabia against the Yemeni people." Among the themes dealt with were "Western media and the international organizations' silence," "Crimes and the murder of children in Yemen" and "The treason of Arab leaders." There were cartoons of several world leaders, among them the rulers of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Israel, France and the United States (IRNA, June 15, 2015).



Iranian Intervention in the Palestinian Arena

■ Ramazan Sharif, in charge of public relations for the IRGC and chief of staff of the Council of Islamic Propaganda and Al-Quds Intifada, announced that the annual World Jerusalem Day rallies would be held on July 10 this year. World Jerusalem Day is an Iranian initiative held annually since 1979 on the last Friday of the Muslim religious month of Ramadan as a way of showing Iranian and the Muslim world's support for the Palestinian cause and the "liberation of Jerusalem." This year the Iranians decided to move Jerusalem Day up a week because the last Friday of Ramadan falls on Eid al-Fitr, whose date is determined separately by each Muslim country in accordance with the appearance of the new moon (Sepah News, June 22, 2015).

Iranian Intervention in the Gulf States

■ Iran condemned Bahrain's decision to sentence Shi'ite opposition leader Sheikh Ali Salman to four years in prison. Salman, the Shi'ite cleric who heads the al-Wefaq association, was convicted of collaborating with foreign governments and incitement. Ms. Marzieh Afkham, spokeswoman for the Iranian foreign ministry, called on the Bahraini authorities to release Salman immediately, stating that security measures would not help solve Bahrain's problems and that only negotiation and responsiveness to the demands of the country's moderate groups would ensure Bahrain's stability (ISNA, June 16, 2015).

■ Iran rejected the Bahraini authorities' recent accusations regarding the confiscation of Iranian-made explosives intended, the Bahrainis claimed, for attacks in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. An official in the Iranian foreign ministry strongly denied the accusations,

claiming that Bahrain's repeated accusations in recent years did not solve the country's problems and only made them worse. He called on Bahrain's authorities to prefer serious dialogue to "tribal and security approaches" (IRNA, June 19, 2015).

The Shi'ite rebellion against the al-Khalifa dynasty that broke out in Bahrain in February 2011 worsened the already tense relations between Iran and Bahrain. The authorities in Bahrain accused Iran of fomenting public unrest. On a number of occasions in the past Iran has raised demands for sovereignty over Bahrain, claiming it should be an integral part of Iran in view of the fact that it was once part of ancient Persian empires.

- In February 2013 the Bahraini authorities announced they had exposed a terrorist cell operated by the IRGC and trained in Iraq and Lebanon. Bahrain is located in the heart of the Persian Gulf and is strategically important to Iran. The fact that it is a country with a Shi'ite majority and home to an American military presence, makes it a target for Iranian terrorism and subversion.

Iranian Religious and Propagation Activities around the Globe

- Qorban-Ali Pour-Marjan, Iran's cultural attaché in Italy, participated in a conference dealing with Shi'ite messianism organized by the Bayt al-Hikma International Research Center in Rome. Participants included religious scholars, clerics and correspondents from Italy and Iran, who discussed the concept of Shi'ite messianism. Pour-Marjan's lecture dealt with messianic thought in modern Iran.



- Abbas Azizi, the Iranian cultural attaché in Albania, participated in a conference organized by the Muslim Committee in Albania to discuss "The values of the month of Ramadan" (IRNA, June 22, 2015).



- Hojjatollah Ebrahimian, the Iranian cultural attaché in Indonesia, was interviewed by Indonesia's TVMu channel. He discussed Iranian customs for Ramadan (Hawza News, June 22 2015).

