



Spotlight on Iran

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Overview

Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, stressed that Iran would continue to support the Palestinians, Yemenis, Syrians, Iraqis, Bahrainis and Lebanese even after the nuclear deal had been signed. (That is, Iran will continue supporting terrorist organizations and th Iranian-sponsored Shi'ite militias operating in those countries.)

Two high-ranking Iranian officers were killed in Syria; a Basij operative was killed in Iraq.

The commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps – Qods Force (IRGC-QF) called Iran's support for Syria "a supreme religious obligation."

The visit paid by senior Hamas official Khaled Mashaal to Saudi Arabia was severely criticized by Iran.

Senior Iranian Officials' Statements on Iran's Regional Involvement

■ Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, delivering an Eid al-Fitr sermon, said that whether the nuclear deal were approved or not, Iran would not stop supporting its regional friends. He claimed Iran would always support the Palestinian people, Yemen, the Syrian government and people, Iraq, the people of Bahrain and the fighters in Lebanon and Palestine (Fars News Agency, July 18, 2015). In protest, Bahrain summoned the Iranian chargé d'affaires in Manama to clarify Khamenei's remarks (Press TV, July 19, 2015).

■ Ali-Akbar Velayati, advisor to Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei for international affairs, said in a newspaper interview that he did not expect Iran to change its regional policies after the nuclear deal. Iran, he said, was determined to continue

supporting Iraq in its struggle against the terrorism threatening all the countries of the region and the countries of the West as well. He noted that Iran's support of the peoples of Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen was a humanitarian and Islamic duty. He added that fighting terrorism beyond the borders of Iran was vital for ensuring Iran's territorial integrity and political life. The fight against terrorism and the struggle against American and other foreign intervention in regional affairs was, he claimed, part of the Iran's strategic mission. He also claimed the United States had recently approached Iran to request talks about the developments in Syria and Yemen, but that Iran had denied the request (Fars News Agency, July 21, 2015).

■ On July 22, 2015, the Entekhab website reported that during the nuclear talks held between Iran and the P5+1, Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran's foreign minister, had defended the IRGC's regional activities, rejecting Western criticism of actions taken by the Qods Force and its commander, Qasem Soleimani. According to the report, Zarif told Western representatives that if Soleimani had not stood up to ISIS and other Islamic extremists in Syria and Iraq, today the West would be facing a different situation in many cities in both countries.

Iranian Intervention in Syria

■ Two high-ranking IRGC officers were killed in Syria during the past two weeks. Colonel Hajj Karim Ghavabash, 48, from Khuzestan Province was killed in Syria on July 11, 2015 (Modafeon.blog.ir, July 12, 2015). He was buried in Ahvaz, the capital of Khuzestan Province, on July 16, 2015 (Defa Press, July 16, 2015).



■ Also killed was Qasem Gharib, 33, from Golestan Province (qasemsoleimani.ir website, July 13, 2015). He was buried in Gorgan in Golestan on July 14, 2015 (Defa Press, July 15, 2015)



■ On July 20, 2015, the Abna News Agency reported that Seyyed Ali Ja'fari had been released in a military action on July 19, 2015. Ja'fari was a Fatmioun battalion¹ fighter taken captive seven months ago during the campaign to liberate the city of Al-Shaykh Maskin in Daraa (Syria).



¹ A battalion composed of Afghan volunteers working for the IRGC in Syria.

- Hojjat-ul-Islam Ali Sa'idi, the Supreme Leader's representative in the IRGC, met with Basij and IRGC fighters. He told them that Iran's support of Syria should not be criticized because the resistance front in Syria was the forward front against "the Zionist regime and global arrogance." If, he said, the Syrian front fell, the other fronts would fall as well.
- Qasem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, met with veterans of the Iran-Iraq war and families of the war's martyrs who had defended the Zaynab shrine in Damascus. He told them that defending a holy site had been defined as a supreme religious obligation by Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Revolution, (armanekerman.ir website, July 17, 2015).



- Syrian Prime Minister Wael al-Halki asked Iran to use the nuclear deal and the expected thawing of Iranian assets frozen abroad to increase investment in Syria and increase its loans (Asr-e Iran, July 17, 2015).

Iranian Intervention in Iraq

- Javad Koohsari, 29, a Basij fighter from Mashhad, was killed in Iraq on July 17, 2015 (qasamsoleimani.ir website, July 21, 2015).



- On July 17, 2015, an IRGC-affiliated Facebook page posted a picture of Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, at a recent meeting with the commanders of the Jihad Battalions militia and with Abu-Mahdi al-Muhandis, commander of the Hezbollah Battalions militia, which operates under Iranian aegis. The objective of the meeting was allegedly to plan the campaign for the occupation of the Iraqi city of Fallujah in Al-Anbar Province.



- On July 21, 2015, Qasem Soleimani attended a ceremony held in Tehran in memory of the commander of Badr Force operations in Iraq, Abu-Muntazer al-Muhammadawi. He was killed approximately a week ago in battle against ISIS in the

Fallujah region. After his death, IRGC commander Mohammad Ali Ja'fari sent his condolences to the family, praising al-Muhammadawi's courage (Alef, July 21, 2015).

■ Qods Force commander Qasem Soleimani met in Irbil with Masoud Barzani, president of the Iraqi Kurdish Autonomous Region. Barzani thanked him for Iran's support of Iraq in its war against ISIS, and Soleimani assured him that the nuclear deal would not result in any change in Iran's regional policies (Asr-e Iran, July 22, 2015).

■ On July 20, 2015, the London-based Arabic-language Al-Arabi Al-Jadid website reported that Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, had advised the Iraqi leadership to withdraw Iranian forces supporting the Iraqi army in the Al-Anbar battle.

■ According to the report, the Iraqi forces' attack in the province did not result in significant progress against ISIS and caused the Iraq army heavy losses. As a result, Haydar al-Abadi, the Iraqi prime minister, invited General Dempsey to Baghdad for advice on the next phase of the battle. Dempsey met with Khalid Obaydi, the Iraqi minister of defense, and advised the Iraqi leaders to withdraw the Iranian forces from Al-Anbar, claiming that their presence fomented secular tension. He advised them to rely instead on the Iraqi army, the Iraqi police and local tribal forces.

■ This past week Qais al-Khazali, leader of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, one of the Shi'ite militias supported by Iran, met with Ayatollah Seyyed Nureddin Shakouri, Ayatollah Seyyed Kazem Haeri's representative in Iraq. They discussed developments in Iraq and the situation of the Iraqi popular militias. Ayatollah Haeri, who lives in Qom, Iran, is considered a source of emulation for Shi'ites in Iraq (Abna News Agency, July 20, 2015).



- The Iranian clerics are involved in Iraq to maintain the influence of Iran's Shi'ite establishment (centered in Qom) in Iraq. That is because most of the senior Shi'ite clerics (especially Ayatollah Ali Sistani) oppose the idea of "Guardianship of the Jurisprudent"² practiced in Iran. In addition, the Iranian clerics are concerned by the strengthening of the Shi'ite religious elites in Najaf and Karbala, cities holy to Shi'a, at the expense of the Iranian religious establishment.

Iranian Intervention in Yemen

- Esmail Ahmadi-Moghaddam, former commander of the law enforcement forces and recently appointed head of the headquarters to support the Yemeni people, held a press conference to mark the beginning of Iran's solidarity week with the Yemeni people. He said that since the beginning of the fighting in Yemen Iran had sent four shipments of medical aid and food by air to Yemen. Two planes were sent to Sanaa but could not land because of the Saudi Arabian embargo on Yemen, and two were sent to Djibouti, where one plane did not receive permission to land.

² Velayat-e Faqih, a theory first expounded by the Ayatollah Khomeini, which argues that the government should be run according to Islamic law (Sharia) and headed by the "guardian jurist," a religious figure.



■ Ahmadi-Moghaddam said that only a small fraction of the aid Iran sent to Yemen eventually arrived because UN agencies and the Red Cross used various excuses to delay deliveries. He said Iran was also prepared to accept Yemenis wounded in Saudi Arabian bombings, but that so far that had not been possible. He said the Iranian headquarters to support the Yemeni people were also using public diplomacy against Saudi actions in Yemen. He appealed to the Iranian public to donate funds to the headquarters rather than goods such as fuel, food or medicines, since it was difficult to deliver them to Yemen (Fars News Agency, July 15, 2015).

Iranian Intervention in the Palestinian Arena

■ Salah al-Bardawil, a senior Hamas official in the Gaza Strip, claimed that Hamas leader Khaled Mashaal's visit to Saudi Arabia would not influence the Hamas movement's relations with Iran. He claimed Hamas would maintain relations with everyone who provided it with financial, military and moral support (Fars News Agency, July 19, 2015). This past week the Iranian media gave extensive coverage to Mashaal's visit to Saudi Arabia, the first in three years. The reports were extremely critical, a result of the tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia because of the ongoing fighting in Yemen.

■ The Iranian reformist daily paper Ghanoon attacked Hamas after Mashaal's visit to Riyadh. On July 20, 2015, it published an op-ed piece entitled "Hamas: a bank account in Tehran and a stronghold in Riyadh." It dealt with the crisis in Hamas-Iran relations, which began with the onset of the civil war in Syria and worsened with the ongoing fighting in Yemen. According to the paper, during last year's war in the Gaza Strip the Saudis supported the Zionists, and the only aid Saudi Arabia gave the

Gazans was sending coffins for their dead. Wahhabi ideological concepts, said the article, were therefore the only justification for Hamas' rapprochement with the rulers of Saudi Arabia.

- Mohammad Esmā'il Kowsari, a member of the Majlis (the Iranian parliament) committee for national security, called Mashaal's visit to Riyadh another strategic mistake committed by Hamas, which had not learned the lesson of the events in Syria. He said Hamas had to know that the Palestinian people would not realize their rights through connections with senior Saudi officials, and that Iran would decide what its future relations with Hamas would be in due time, taking into consideration what was best for the Palestinian people.

- Nozar Shafii, another member of the Majlis committee for national security, also criticized Mashaal's visit to Saudi Arabia, but stressed that Iran's support for the Palestinian people would not stop. Iran's position vis-à-vis Hamas, he said, was ideological and based on support for the Palestinian people. Hamas, he said, had to adopt the same approach towards Iran and examine the situation from an Islamic, not an Arab point of view. He said Saudi Arabia's position towards Hamas was utilitarian and that Hamas' increasing ties with the Saudi regime endangered Islam and international peace.

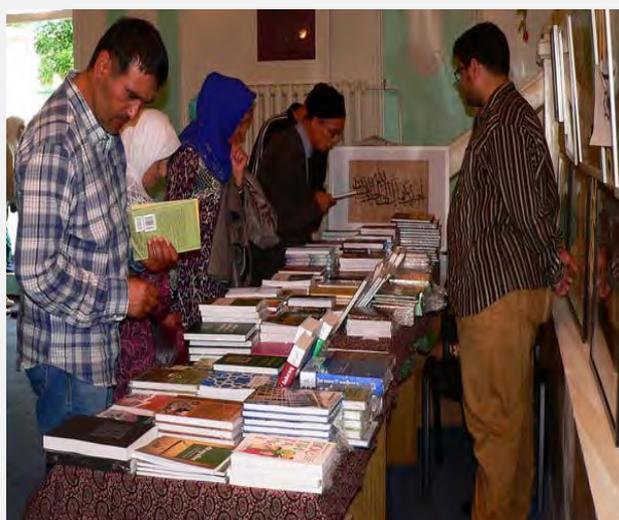
- Mansour Haqiqatpour, vice-chairman of the Majlis national security and foreign policy commission, said that Mashaal's visit to Saudi Arabia was not the first mistake Hamas had made in recent years. Hamas, he said, had collaborated on a number of occasions with various countries, among them Turkey and Qatar, against Iran. However, Iran regarded itself as ideologically committed to support Palestine. He threatened that if Hamas did not change its ways, it would not be able to profit from Iran's capabilities.

Iranian Religious and Propagation Activities around the Globe

- Rabani Nasab, a cleric from the religious seminary in Qom, paid a visit to Indonesia for the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. He gave a lecture on Shi'ite subjects in the city of Cirebon during a visit to the home of Mohammad Alkaf, a senior Shi'ite in Cirebon and author of Islamic books. Nasab also engaged in religious propagation in the city of Kuningan (Hawza News, July 16, 2015).



■ The Islamic Studies Foundation, which disseminates Islamic and Iranian culture in Russia, recently organized an exhibition of books in a mosque in the city of Ufa, the capital of the Republic of Bashkortostan. The exhibition, held for Eid al-Fitr, featured 70 books on Islamic subjects and Iranian novels translated from Farsi (Hawza News, July 22, 2015).



■ The conservative Fars News Agency launched a new weekly magazine in Kyrgyzstan Russian. On July 22, 2015, Fars announced that its offices in Bishkek, the capital city, had published two editions so far. The magazine is called "Iran, the News of the Week in Review," and deals with Iranian politics, the economy, culture science, and social issues covered by Fars News Agency.