



*Spotlight on Iran*  
*August 9 - 23, 2015*  
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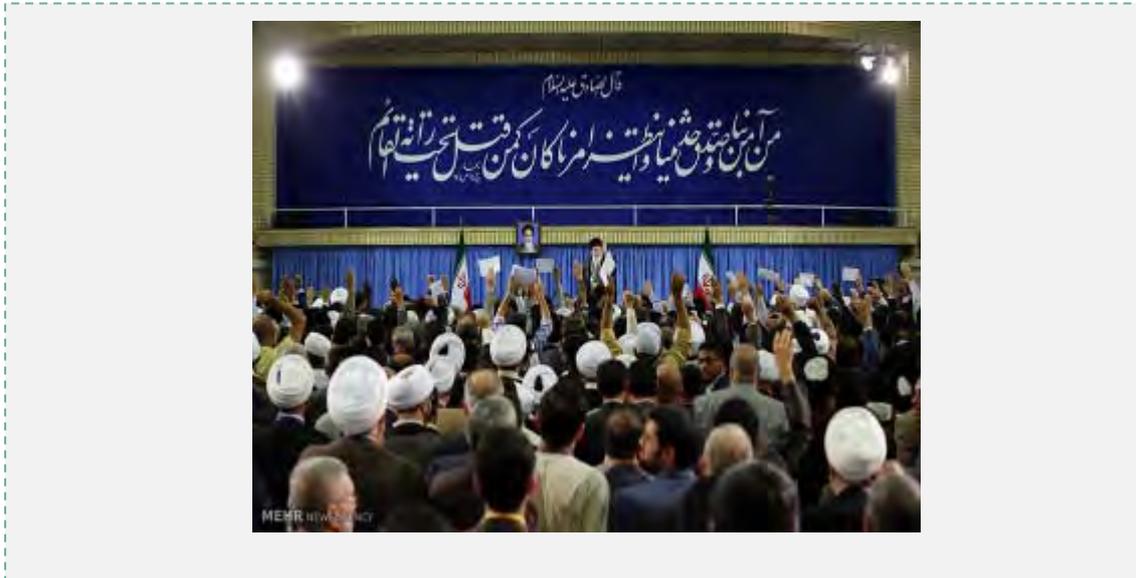
## Overview

- ✓ A conference of the Ahl al-Bayt World Assembly was held in Tehran. Senior officials of the Iranian regime used the platform to stress Iran's commitment to supporting its regional allies even in the post nuclear-agreement era, including the provision of weapons.
- ✓ The Iranian foreign minister visited Syria and Lebanon, emphasizing Iran's support of Syria and Hezbollah.
- ✓ More fighters in the Shi'ite Afghan brigade serving in Syria under the aegis of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guards (IIRG) were killed.
- ✓ There has been extensive media coverage of the crisis in Iran-Hamas relations in the wake of Khaled Mashaal's visit to Saudi Arabia.
- ✓ Iran has increased its activity in the international arena due to the Saudi attacks in Yemen and the defeats incurred by the Houthi rebels.

## Senior Iranian Officials' Statements on Iran's Regional Involvement

- In Tehran this past week a conference was held of the Ahl al-Bayt, which operates under the supervision of the office of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and whose task is to spread Shi'a around the globe. The Supreme Leader gave a speech in which he stressed the need to fight the United States' escalating efforts to infiltrate the region and increase its political influence. He claimed that when the Americans and "Zionists" saw the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt collapse they decided to topple the other countries in the Middle East, beginning with Syria.
- He claimed the wars currently being fought in Iraq, Syria and Yemen were political, not religious wars, and stressed that Iran was committed to supporting "the oppressed people" in the Middle East, whether Shi'ite or Sunni. He added that Iran regarded the Palestinian problem as the most important issue facing the Arab-Muslim

world and would support anyone who fought against Israel. He claimed that contrary to what was alleged about Iran, it did not intervene in the internal affairs of other states, like Bahrain and Yemen, but would continue to support the peoples of the region (Fars News Agency, August 17, 2015).



**Khamenei speaks at the Ahl al-Bayt conference.**

- Iranian president Hassan Rouhani told the conference that the Islamic Revolution in Iran flew the flag of Islamic renaissance throughout the world. He gave the examples of the anti-Israeli "resistance" in Lebanon, the Islamic movements in Turkey and North Africa and the Islamic movements throughout the Muslim world as indicating the Islamic renaissance that had begun with the Islamic Revolution in Iran. He stressed the need for Islamic unity, which he claimed Iran advocated, which transcended the differences between Shi'ites and Sunnis. Regarding Islamic extremism in the Middle East, he said those who employed violence and destroyed mosques and churches did not represent true Islam (Fars News Agency, August 15, 2015).

- Ali-Akbar Velayati, the Supreme Leader's advisor for international affairs, told the conference that Iran would continue to support the "resistance front" and that the nuclear agreement would make it possible to increase Iran's support for its regional allies. He said the situation of the resistance front had improved (Fars News Agency, August 15, 2015).

- The statements made by senior Iranian officials at the Ahl al-Bayt conference clearly indicated Iran's attempt to impress its allies with its commitment to continue supporting them even after the nuclear agreement with the West. The speeches of

the senior officials also reflected Iran's approach to the rise and strengthening of ISIS and radical Sunni Islam: Shi'a-Sunni collaboration to fight radical Islam.

■ Interviewed by Tasnim News, Ali-Akbar Velayati said Iran would not allow the United States to again extend its political influence in the region. He said that as far as Iran was concerned, it made no difference whether the Americans tried to return to the Middle East through Iran, Iraq or Syria. The United States had been expelled from Iran during the Islamic Revolution, expelled from Iraq and had failed in Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. They were now trying to regain their influence in Iraq, Syria and other Islamic states, but the Middle Eastern countries and people, led by Iran, had awakened and were standing firm (Tasnim News, August 17, 2015).

■ Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Iranian foreign minister, said Iran would continue providing weapons to support the Middle Eastern countries fighting terrorism. Speaking at a conference held in Tehran to discuss the nuclear agreement between Iran and the foreign powers, he said that Iran intended to preserve its defensive capabilities and send weapons to its regional allies. He said that without Iran and the weapons it provided to the countries fighting terrorism, the capital cities of the Middle East would have been occupied by ISIS (Fars News Agency, August 9, 2015).

■ Hassan Firouzabadi, chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces, claimed the Iraqi government had recently made significant gains in its fight against terrorism and proved its ability to preserve Iraq's independence and territorial integrity.

■ Regarding the situation in Syria, he said the Syrian regime had proved it could overcome its opponents, and protect Syria's national interests and its constitution. He was certain, he said, that Islamic terrorist groups, especially ISIS, would eventually be eliminated. He claimed he was also optimistic about the situation in Yemen, and said that regardless of the strong support for those loyal to the former Yemeni government, they could not win.

■ Firouzabadi also discussed the situation in Bahrain, saying Bahrainis should not be oppressed and that the government of Bahrain had to reach an understanding with the opposition and release its leaders from prison (Defa Press, August 9, 2015).



### Hassan Firouzabadi

- Masoud Jazaeri, deputy commander of the Iranian army, told a press conference that Iran did not need a physical presence in Syria, Iraq or Yemen because their governments and people could defend themselves. That was his response to recent media reports about the presence of Iranian forces in northern Syria (Fars News Agency, August 17, 2015).
- More than 70 members of the Majlis (the Iranian parliament) signed a letter to Iranian president Rouhani demanding continued Iranian support for the regional resistance front after the nuclear agreement. They called on the president to use the ministries of defense and foreign affairs to send aid to the Palestinians in accordance with instructions from the Supreme Leader to arm the Palestinians in the West Bank. Javad Karimi Qoddousi, a member of the Majlis national security and foreign relations committee, said that all the senior Iranian officials had to support aid for the Palestinian people and the resistance front so that the nuclear agreement would not be exploited to strengthen Israel's security (Fars News Agency, August 18, 2015).

### *Iranian Intervention in Syria*

- On August 12, 2015 Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif paid a visit to Syria and met with Syrian President Bashar Assad and Minister of Defense Walid al-Muallem to discuss the ongoing Syrian crisis. Zarif stressed Iran's determination to continue its support of Syria and said the fate of Syria had to be determined by the Syrian people without foreign intervention (IRNA, August 12, 2015).



### **Foreign Minister Zarif meets with President Assad**

- On August 11, 2015, the London-based Arabic language website Al-Araby Al-Jadeed reported that the Iranian initiative presented by Foreign Minister Zarif to resolve the Syrian crisis included a ceasefire between the regime and the opposition. Both sides would retain the areas they currently controlled, would collaborate against ISIS with support from the international coalition, negotiate for the establishment of a national unity government, draft a new constitution and hold elections under international supervision.
- In the meantime, the Syrian opposition accused Iran of trying to change regional demography near the capital city of Damascus. According to opposition sources, Iran demanded that within the framework of resolving the Syrian crisis, Sunnis living in Al-Zabadani would be moved to territories under rebel control in northern Syria and Shi'ites from the Shi'ite villages of Fu'ah and Kefraya would be moved to territories under the control of the Syrian regime (Al-Jazeera, August 15, 2015).
- Hossein Amir Abdollahian, deputy foreign minister for Arab and African affairs, met in Tehran with Omran al-Zoubi, the Syrian minister of information. Abdollahian told him that Iran would pursue its current strategy in Syria and would not change its position regarding the fight against extremism or its support for Syria. He said Iran's support of its neighbors was the top priority of its foreign policy (Mehr News Agency, August 16, 2015).
- Seyyed Mohammad Hosseini, an Afghan fighter in the Fatmioun Brigade operating under the aegis of the IIRG, who was wounded half a year ago by a land mine in Daraa in Syria, died on August 6, 2015, and was buried in Mashhad, Iran (Modafeon.ir, August 7, 2015).



**Seyyed Mohammad Hosseini, who was wounded in Syria and buried in Mashhad, Iran**

- On August 13, 2015, a funeral was held in Tehran for Mehdi Ahmadi, Salman Qalandari, Esmail Hosseini and Abdollah Didari, four Fatmioun Brigade fighters killed in Syria a number of weeks ago (Masriq News, August 14, 2015).
- A funeral was held in Isfahan for Hassan Moradi and Ali-Reza Nazeri, also Fatmioun Brigade fighters killed in Syria, and on August 20, 2015, two other Fatmioun Brigade fighters were buried in Karaj in Iran's Alborz Province (Modafeon.ir, August 11 and 19, 2015). So far more than 120 Afghan fighters have been killed in the fighting in Syria.



#### The funeral held in southern Tehran for four Fatmioun Brigade fighters

■ Saeed Ohadi, head of Iran's Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization, said in a statement that Iranians would soon be able to make pilgrimages to the sites in Syria holy to Shi'a once again, after coordination with senior Syrian officials and with the authorization of the Iran's Supreme National Security Council. He said a Syrian delegation would arrive in Tehran in the near future to examine ways to renew pilgrimages. When the Syrian civil war broke out in March 2012, the Iranian government forbade Iranians from going on pilgrimages to Syria (IRNA, August 17, 2015).

#### Iranian Intervention in Lebanon

■ On August 11-12, 2015, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif visited Lebanon where he met with senior officials in the Lebanese government and Hezbollah. They discussed regional developments and bilateral relations. Meeting with Nabih Berri, chairman of the Lebanese Parliament, and Lebanese Foreign Minister Samir Moqbel, Zarif said the nuclear agreement between Iran and the West would prepare the ground for increased collaboration among regional countries in the fight against extremism and terrorism. Meeting with Hezbollah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah, he praised Hezbollah and said that all the political groups in Lebanon had to collaborate against the "Zionist plots and extremist groups" (IRNA, August 12, 2015). Meeting with representatives of Lebanese and Palestinian organizations, Zarif said that Iran would always support the "resistance" against "the Zionist regime" and that the nuclear agreement was a victory for the resistance and a day of mourning for the Israeli prime minister (ISNA, August 12, 2015).



#### Zarif meets with Nasrallah.

- Ali Larijani, chairman of the Iranian Majlis, sent letters to Hezbollah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah and Lebanese Parliament chairman Nabih Berri congratulating them on the anniversary of the Second Lebanon War. He praised Hezbollah and the Lebanese people for their "great victory" (Mehr News Agency, August 14, 2015). In addition, the Iranian foreign ministry issued a statement congratulating the Lebanese people, the government of Lebanon, the Lebanese army and Hezbollah, and stressing Iran's continuing commitment to supporting Lebanon. It called the war a symbol of the resistance and fortitude of the Lebanese people against Israel (ISNA, August 15, 2015).
- Conservative senior cleric Ayatollah Seyyed Ahmad Khatami, Tehran's interim Friday prayers leader, visited Lebanon, where he met with Lebanese Shi'ite clerics. Visiting the grave of Abbas Mussawi, the Hezbollah secretary general killed by Israel in 1992, Khatami praised Hezbollah and said that as long as there was even one oppressed person left on earth, the Islamic Revolution would follow the path of resistance against "arrogance" (Hawza News, August 9 2015).
- In the middle of August, Hojjat-ul-Islam Seyyed Mohammad Hossein al-Ayub, director of foreign relations for Iran's religious seminaries, visited Lebanon, where he met with Lebanese clerics (Hawza News, August 17, 2015).

### *Iranian Intervention in Iraq*

- Ammar al-Hakim, chairman of the Iraqi Supreme Islamic Council, visited Iran last week to participate in the Ahl al-Bayt conference. On August 18, 2015, he told Iran's ABNA news agency that without the advice Iraq had received from Qasem Soleimani, commander of the IRCG's Qods Force, it could not have opposed ISIS to the extent it

had. Al-Hakim also met with senior Iranian officials, among them Zarif, the foreign minister, and Ali Shamkhani, secretary of the Supreme National Security Council.

- Iraqi media sources reported that Qasem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, had recently arrived in Baghdad to convince the Iraqi government not to bring former Iraqi prime minister Nuri al-Maliki to trial. Following a parliamentary investigation, Al-Maliki is expected to be tried for his responsibility for the fall of Mosul to ISIS last year and his alleged involvement in corruption (Okaz, August 17, 2015).

### *Iranian Intervention in Yemen*

- Eshaq Jahangiri, Iranian vice president, met with Peter Maurer, the president of the Red Cross. Jahangiri told him that Iran was prepared to increase its humanitarian aid to Yemen through the Red Cross. He said the crisis in Yemen could only be resolved through dialogue between the various Yemeni groups and called on the Red Cross to increase its humanitarian aid to the Yemeni people (IRNA, August 12, 2015).

- Hossein Amir Abdollahian, deputy foreign minister for Arab and African affairs, held a telephone conversation with Ismail Weld al-Sheikh Ahmad, the UN secretary general's envoy for Yemeni affairs. They discussed recent developments in Yemen and UN plans for a ceasefire between the various warring Yemeni groups. Abdollahian stressed the need to immediately end Saudi Arabia's attacks in Yemen, to lift the siege of Yemen and to seek a political solution for the crisis (Tabnak, August 14, 2015). In recent weeks forces loyal to the exile Yemeni government retook a number of cities in Yemen (including the important port city of Aden) from the Iran-supported Houthi Shi'ite rebels.

### *Iranian Intervention in the Palestinian Arena*

- On August 11, 2015, Mahmoud al-Zahar, a member of the Hamas leadership, told a Filastin al-Yawm reporter that in the near future a Hamas delegation would visit Iran. He claimed relations between Hamas and Iran were good and that Hamas had to mobilize resources from all the Arab-Muslim countries to support the resistance in Palestine. He claimed Iran had to give the Palestinian resistance unconditional, unlimited support just as Hamas did not present any conditions or raise any obstacles in its relations with Iran. He made the statements following the continuing media reports of a crisis in Hamas-Iran relations. The reports included Tehran's cancellation of a planned Hamas delegation visit in the wake of the visit last month of Khaled Mashaal, Hamas leader, to Saudi Arabia.

■ On August 16, 2015, Ahmad Bakhshayesh Ardestani, a member of the Majlis National Security Committee, responded to reports in the daily newspaper Aftab Yazd about the visit to Tehran planned by Mahmoud Abbas, chairman of the Palestinian Authority. He said the visit did not herald a change in Iran's position regarding the Palestinians, but that it had to be remembered that Iran always supported Hamas. He said only one jihadi group in Hamas had relations with Iran, while other groups and individuals, such as Ismail Haniya and Khaled Mashaal, operated separately.

■ Ardestani said Iran had supported Hamas during the war in the Gaza Strip [Operation Protective Edge], but that Hamas's position on Syria was contrary to Iran's. In addition, Hamas supported Saudi Arabia despite the Saudi army's attacks on Yemen. Therefore, Iran had to use the rivalry between Hamas and Fatah to exert influence on Hamas. He said Hamas understood financial consideration could not be a reason for collaboration with Saudi Arabia.

■ Ardestani said Iran did not expect Hamas to take a position contrary to Iran's on Syria or Yemen because Iran was Hamas' only support in its war against Israel. He stressed that Iran did not want to exchange Hamas for Fatah but rather to make it clear to Hamas that if it changed its position, Iran could support Fatah as well. Iran, he claimed, had no intention of abandoning Hamas but rather wanted to create a balance between Hamas and Fatah, and if in the future the two movements established a stable government that operated against Israel, Iran would definitely have ties to both movements.

■ Interviewed by the Palestinian news website Al-Resalah, Hossein Sheikholeslam, international advisor to the chairman of the Majlis, said that Iran had rejected Mahmoud Abbas's request to visit Iran. He said Iran had strategic relations with Hamas and no one could harm the friendship between them (Fars News Agency, August 19, 2015).

### *Iranian Intervention in the Gulf States*

■ The Bahraini police force said in an announcement that it had exposed a direct Iranian-Hezbollah connection to the terrorist attack in Bahrain on July 28, 2015, in which two security force members were killed in an IED explosion. According to the announcement, the five suspects arrested for involvement in the attack admitted they were connected to the IRGC and Hezbollah. Following the announcement the Iranian foreign ministry again denied Iran was in any way involved in terrorist attacks carried out in Bahraini territory (Press TV, August 13, 2015).

## *Iranian Religious and Propagation Activities around the Globe*

- A delegation of clerics from Senegal recently visited the Iranian cultural center in Dakar. The delegation included the Friday prayer leader in one of the large mosques in Dakar and members of Senegal's Islamic clerical council. They met with Hassan Zakeri, cultural attaché to the Iranian embassy in Senegal, and discussed ways to increase bilateral religious collaboration (Hawza News, August 10 2015).