



Spotlight on Iran

August 23 - September 6, 2015

Editor: Dr. Raz Zimmé



Overview¹

- ✓ The commander of the IRGC said Iran would continue to support the "resistance front" with all the means at its disposal and that it regarded its complete support of Syria as a revolutionary duty.
- ✓ Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, reviewed regional developments for the Iranian Assembly of Experts and said that the decline in American influence strengthened the influence of Iran and the resistance front.
- ✓ An IRGC officer was killed and a TV correspondent wounded in a clash with ISIS in Latakia, Syria.
- ✓ Three fighters in the Shi'ite Afghan brigade, which operates under IRGC aegis in Syria, were buried this past week in various locations in Iran.
- ✓ Naim Qassem, Hezbollah's deputy secretary general, said Hezbollah was proud of its relations with Iran.
- ✓ Ramadan Shallah, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad secretary general, praised Iran's strategic support for the Palestinians, claiming he had recently met with the Iranian foreign minister to discuss the Palestinian issue.

Senior Iranian Officials' Statements on Iran's Regional Involvement

- Mohammad-Ali Jafari, IRGC commander, told a press conference last week that Iran and particularly the IRGC were prepared to use all their force to fight the opponents of the resistance front. He said that in addition to "advisory assistance," the IRGC and the Iranian armed forces would support any country asking for help, and would use all the means at their disposal until the enemy's complete defeat.
- Referring to the situation in Syria, Jafari claimed Syria was the forward line of the Islamic Revolution's resistance front, which was one reason why Iran supported the

¹ Due to the Jewish holidays the next Spotlight on Iran will appear in three weeks.

Syrian regime and its people. Syria had supported Iran since the early days of the revolution, during the Iran-Iraq War and was part of the resistance axis. That was why the United States wanted to overthrow the Syrian regime. Iran, he claimed, regarded its complete support of Syria as a revolutionary duty.

■ Jafari claimed that Iran would not alter its regional policies or stop supporting the "resistance groups" even after the nuclear agreement. The United States and the West used the nuclear issue as an excuse to continue their fight against Iran while their main objective was to harm the Islamic Revolution and the Islamic resistance, but Iran would not stop its struggle against "global arrogance" and would support the oppressed (Sepah News, September 1, 2015).



The IRGC commander at a press conference, picture from Sepah News

■ On September 1, 2015, Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, reviewed regional developments for the semi-annual meeting of the Iranian Assembly of Experts. The Assembly is composed of 86 clerics and is authorized to oversee the activities of the supreme leader, appoint his successor and even oust him if it finds him unfit to continue serving at his post.

■ Soleimani spoke about developments in Iraq, Syria and Yemen, the fight against ISIS and the other radical Sunni organizations in the region, and the decline in American influence, which, he claimed had increased Iranian influence and strengthened the resistance front. He said Iran supported Syria in order to preserve the resistance axis, and that the United States sought to divide Iraq but would not succeed. Regarding developments in Yemen, he said that the Houthi rebels, who operated as part of the Ansarollah movement, had the support of more than 50% of

the Yemenis and that Saudi Arabia would never win the war in Yemen (Tasnim News Agency; Abna News, September 1, 2015).

■ It was not the first time Soleimani had been invited to appear before the Assembly of Experts to review regional developments, strongly indicating his central position in formulating Iran's regional policy.

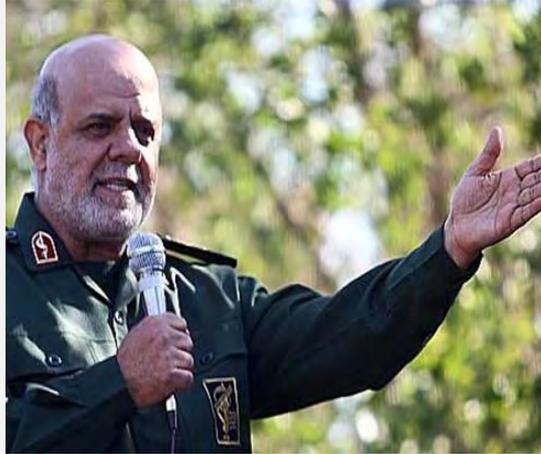
■ Hossein Dehqan, Iranian defense minister, told a convention in Tehran that Iran was determined to continue its support of the resistance front and of all countries suffering from oppression and discrimination, for which Iran was the only support. He said the United States and Israel sought to take over the Islamic countries and humiliate them by supporting regional terrorists (Sepah News, August 30, 2015).



Hossein Dehqan, Iranian defense minister, picture from Sepah News

■ Iraj Masjedi, senior Qods Force advisor, claimed Iranian fighters had strategic, training and professional roles in the support of regional groups fighting ISIS and that without an Iranian presence in the regional arena, Iran would have to fight ISIS on its own borders. He claimed the Saudis, the Americans and the "Zionists" supported the extremist Sunni organizations trying to destroy authentic Islam and the resistance front, and that the popular regional forces, among them Hezbollah in Lebanon and Ansarollah in Yemen, were at the fore in the fight against those organizations. He claimed Iran had to play a defensive and strategic role in heart of the enemy [sic] and the region to keep them from reaching Iran's borders. He added that fighters from the surrounding countries had supported Iran in the Iran-Iraq War and that today Iran had to join the forces of resistance and those fighting for the sake of Allah. Regarding the crisis in Yemen, he said the Shi'ite Houthis viewed the Iranian supreme leader as

their imam and were affiliated with the Islamic Revolution (Entekhab, August 28, 2015)



Iraj Masjedi

Iranian Intervention in Syria

- Last week Hossein Amir Abdollahian, deputy foreign minister for Arab and African affairs, paid a visit to Beirut and Damascus to discuss the crisis in Syria. Meeting with Staffan de Mistura, the UN secretary general's special envoy to Syria, he said that Bashar Assad's continuing presidency of Syria was part of the political solution for the Syrian crisis (IRNA, September 1, 2015).
- Captain Ahmad Hayyari, an IRGC officer from the city of Shush in Khuzestan Province, was killed battling ISIS in Latakia, Syria (Qasemsoleimani.ir, August 26, 2015).



Ahmad Hayyari

- Mohammad Hassan Hosseini, a correspondent for Iranian TV, was wounded in the same incident (Press TV, August 24, 2015).



Iranian TV correspondent Mohammad Hassan Hosseini

- On August 27, 2015, Musa Alizadeh was buried in the Iranian city of Mashhad. He had been a fighter in the Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade, which operates in Syria in the service of the IRGC. He was killed on August 11, 2015, on the outskirts of Damascus (Abna News, August 27, 2015). Two other Fatemiyoun fighters who recently died in Syria were buried in Iran on August 31, 2015. They were Mohammad Taqi Baqeri, buried in Isfahan, and Davud Rezaei, buried in Qom (IRNA; Modafeon, August 31, 2015).



The funeral held for Musa Alizadeh in Mashhad

■ On August 27, 2015, an additional 48-hour ceasefire was declared in the city of Zabadani and two Shi'ite villages, Kefraya and Fuaa, in the Idlib Province, after negotiations held in Turkey between Syrian rebels from the Ahrar al-Sham movement and Iranian representatives (Fars News Agency, August 27, 2015). The ceasefire collapsed after two days. Two weeks ago the Syrian opposition accused Iran of sabotaging the negotiations for a ceasefire in Zabadani after demanding that the resolution of the crisis include the transfer of Sunni residents from Zabadani to rebel-controlled territories in northern Syria, and the evacuation of Shi'ite residents from the villages of Kefraya and Fuaa to territories controlled by the Syrian regime (Al-Jazeera, August 15, 2015).



Graffiti in support of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, on a wall in Zabadani after pro-Syrian regime forces occupied parts of the city.

■ In the meantime, on August 28, 2015, the London-based newspaper Al-Quds Al-Arabi published an article claiming that Iran sought to turn the area around Iranian

embassy in the Al-Mazzah neighborhood of Damascus into a Shi'ite compound through the "Iranian Towers" project, which would lead to the eviction of 200,000 Syrian Sunnis from the region, after which their houses would be destroyed.

Iranian Intervention in Lebanon

■ Naim Qassem, Hezbollah deputy secretary general, met in Beirut with Mehdi Chamran, chairman of the Islamic City Council of Tehran. Qassem told him Hezbollah was proud of its relations with Iran. He claimed that if the world understood Iran's importance in bringing stability and growth to the region and fending off threats, Tehran would be able to complete its constructive role in supporting the resistance front in the liberation of Palestine from the "Zionist occupation." Chamran went to Lebanon to participate in the renaming of a street in Beirut for his father, Mostafa Chamran, the first Iranian defense minister after the Islamic Revolution. Mostafa Chamran was killed in 1981 in the Iran-Iraq War (Fars News Agency, August 27, 2015).



Naim Qassem and Mehdi Chamran meet, picture from Rasa News.

■ Ayatollah Mohsen Haydari, a member of the Assembly of Experts from Khuzestan and the interim Friday Prayers Leader in Ahvaz, met with cultural activists from Ahvaz. He told them that he had written his book about *Velayat-e Faqih* (the Guardianship of Islamic Jurisprudence), following the request of Hassan Nasrallah, the Hezbollah secretary general.

■ He claimed he had met with Nasrallah, who said that despite the affinity of young Lebanese Shi'ites for the Iranian supreme leader, they were insufficiently aware of the political religious perception of Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic

Revolution, and that the Sunnis knew nothing at all about it. He therefore requested that the religious seminaries in Iran write new books about the Guardianship of Islamic Jurisprudence "to rescue the public from its 'unawareness and ignorance' " of the subject. Haydari granted the request and wrote a book. Haydari said that Nasrallah read it and said it would resolve many doubts in the minds of Lebanese youths about the issue, and it was now studied in Hezbollah schools (Tabnak, August 31, 2015).

Iranian Intervention in Yemen and the Gulf States

- On August 26, 2015, Muhammad al-Maqdisi, the chief of staff of the Yemeni army, told the London-based Arabic language newspaper Al-Sharq Al-Awsat that the Yemeni army had recently arrested a group of Iranian advisors, Hezbollah activists and Syrians who had been aiding the forces of former Yemeni President Ali Abdallah Saleh and the Shi'ite Houthi rebels. He said the war in Yemen was being fought between Arabs and Persians, and that Iran was behind the crisis in Yemen.
- On August 26, 2015, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, deputy foreign minister for Arab and African affairs, spoke on the phone with Ismail Weld al-Sheikh Ahmad, the UN secretary general's envoy for Yemeni affairs, and discussed recent developments in Yemen. Abdollahian said Iran stressed that the Saudi attacks in Yemen had to stop, the political crisis had to be resolved through negotiations, and Iran supported UN efforts to resolve it. He invited the UN envoy to Iran for consultations (Fars News Agency, August 27, 2015).
- The Kuwaiti prosecution brought 25 Kuwaitis and one Iranian to trial on accusations of possessing weapons and explosives to be used in terrorist attacks in Kuwait, and of spying for Iran and Hezbollah. According to the prosecution, 22 of the accused had been trained in the use of explosives and weapons with the objective carrying out terrorist attacks in Kuwait to destabilize the country and damage its territorial integrity. Eleven were accused of illegal possession of communications equipment (Gulf News, September 1, 2015). In response to the affair, which was exposed a few weeks ago, the Iranian chargé d'affaires in Kuwait denied any Iranian connection to the accused (Farda News, September 2, 2015).

Iranian Intervention in the Palestinian Arena

- Marzieh Afkham, spokeswoman for the Iranian foreign ministry, said Iran would continue its support for the regional resistance front, especially Hamas. At her weekly news conference in Tehran she was asked about reports of a crisis in Iranian-Hamas relations. She said that support for the resistance front and those fighting the "Zionist regime" was a pillar of Iran's foreign policy (Fars News Agency, August 26, 2015).
- Khaled Mashaal, head of Hamas' political bureau, claimed Hamas would maintain relations with Iran. He said that in recent years differences of opinion had arisen between Iran and Hamas over the issue of Syria, but Hamas wanted good relations with all Arab and Islamic countries, especially Iran, and would continue its historical relations with it (Fars News Agency, August 23, 2015). In the meantime, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu-Mazen), the Palestinian Authority chairman, confirmed he planned to visit Iran in the near future, but that Iran had not yet officially confirmed its date (ISNA, August 24, 2015).
- Ramadan Abdullah Shallah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad secretary general, was interviewed by Al-Mayadeen, the Lebanese TV channel. He praised Iran's "strategic support" for the Palestinians. He described the relations between Iran and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad as "very good" and said that he had recently met with Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Iranian foreign minister, to discuss various issues linked to the Palestinian issue. He added that Iran's support for the Palestinians did not vary according to circumstances but was based on a strategic outlook (IRNA, August 29, 2015).

Iranian Religious and Propagation Activities around the Globe

- Shi'ite cleric Ibrahim Zakzaky, who heads the Islamic Movement in Nigeria, participated in a conference held in Mashhad, Iran. He gave in speech in which he called Iran a role model not only for Shi'ites and Muslims but for all the oppressed peoples and governments around the world. He said the Iranian people were a symbol of the fight against "global arrogance" and dictatorship. He also said that since the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the number of Shi'ites in Nigeria had grown to several millions (IRNA, August 26, 2015).
- Hojjat-ul-Islam Mohammad al-Hassoun, head of the Center for Islamic Faith Studies in Qom, held a 12-days visit to the Ivory Coast where he met with Lebanese Shi'ite immigrants and visited Shi'ite centers (Hawza News, September 2, 2015).



Mohammad al-Hassoun (second from left) visits the Ivory Coast, picture from Hawza News

■ Ayatollah Nouri Hamadani, a senior Shi'ite cleric, went to Azerbaijan last week to meet with Azeri Shi'ite clerics and visit mosques. A reception was held for him at the Baku airport, attended by local clerics, a representative of Azeri leader Ali-Akbar Ocajnejad, the Iranian ambassador to Baku, the cultural attaché at the Iranian embassy and a group of Iranian expatriates living in Azerbaijan. During the reception he said he had come to Azerbaijan to strengthen relations between the two countries. Before Azerbaijan, Hamadani had gone to Tanzania, Kenya and Russia (Abna News, August 31, 2015).



Ayatollah Nouri Hamadani in Azerbaijan

- At the end of August an Iranian Culture Week was held in Serbia, featuring various forms of Iranian artwork and showing Iranian films (IRNA, August 23, 2015).



Iranian Culture Week in Serbia, photo from Mehr News