



Spotlight on Iran¹ (January 17 – 31, 2016)

Dr. Raz Zimmt



Overview

- ✓ Mohammad-Ali Jafari, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), said that one of Iran's major gains from regional developments was the enlistment of more than 200,000 men as fighters in the popular militias in Syria, Iraq and Libya. He said Iran would foil the "Zionist-American plot to divide Iraq and Syria."
- ✓ At least five more IRGC fighters were killed in Syria. Since the beginning of the ground offensive in northern Syria more than 135 Iranian fighters have been killed.
- ✓ Qasem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, appeared in public for the first time since reports of his alleged wounding in Syria. He participated in a memorial ceremony for Brigadier General Mohammad-Ali Allahdadi, killed last year in an aerial attack in the region of Quneitra in the southern Golan Heights.
- ✓ In American and Iraqi Intelligence assessment, the three Americans who disappeared in Baghdad in the middle of January were abducted by Shi'ite militias with ties to Iran. The Iranian foreign minister promised the American secretary of state he would try to help find the missing men.
- ✓ Four Yemeni fighters wounded in the civil war in Yemen who died while receiving medical treatment in Iran were buried in northern Iran despite the reservations of the Iranian Foreign Ministry.

Statements from Senior Iranian Officials about Iran's Regional Involvement

- Mohammad-Ali Jafari, commander of the IRGC, said Iran would foil the "Zionist-American plot to divide Iraq and Syria," and that Palestine was the Muslim world's main concern. At a conference held in Tehran entitled "Gaza, the symbol of

¹ Spotlight on Iran is an Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center bulletin illuminating Iran's activities to establish its influence in the Middle East and beyond. It is based on reports in the Iranian media and written for the ITIC by Dr. Raz Zimmt, an expert on Iran's politics, society, foreign policy and social networks.

resistance," he said that the United States had planned the events of September 11, 2001 as an excuse first to attack countries in the Middle East and then to attack Iran. However, he said, the opposite had occurred, and instead of the Saddam Hussein regime, a government had been established that supported the Islamic Revolution, and in the end the United States was forced to withdraw from Iraq.

■ Jafari strongly attacked Saudi Arabia, claiming the Saudi royal house served the regional interests of the United States and Israel, and supported ISIS. He said the Saudi-affiliated media had taken the Palestinian cause off the Arab-Muslim world's agenda and replaced it with Syria and Iraq.

■ He said the developments in Iraq, Syria and Libya had greatly benefitted Iran in two ways. One was strengthening the ties between the local populations and Iran, ties which had not existed before ISIS had begun operating in either country. He said today the Syrians understood that Iran was the only country supporting them. The other benefit was the enlistment of more than 200,000 men as fighters in the popular militias established in Syria, Iraq and Libya, and that no army, including those of the United States and Israel, could defeat them. They were achievements, he said, that would hold fast until the liberation of Palestine and Jerusalem (Sepah News, January 20, 2016).



Mohammad-Ali Jafari, commander of the IRGC (Sepah News, January 20, 2016).

■ On January 27, 2016, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, deputy foreign minister for Arab-African affairs, arrived in Moscow for talks with senior Russian officials. On the agenda were developments in the Middle East, especially in Syria and Yemen. He met with Mikhail Bogdanov, the deputy foreign minister, who is also the Russian

president's special representative for Middle Eastern and African affairs (Tasnim News, January 27, 2016).

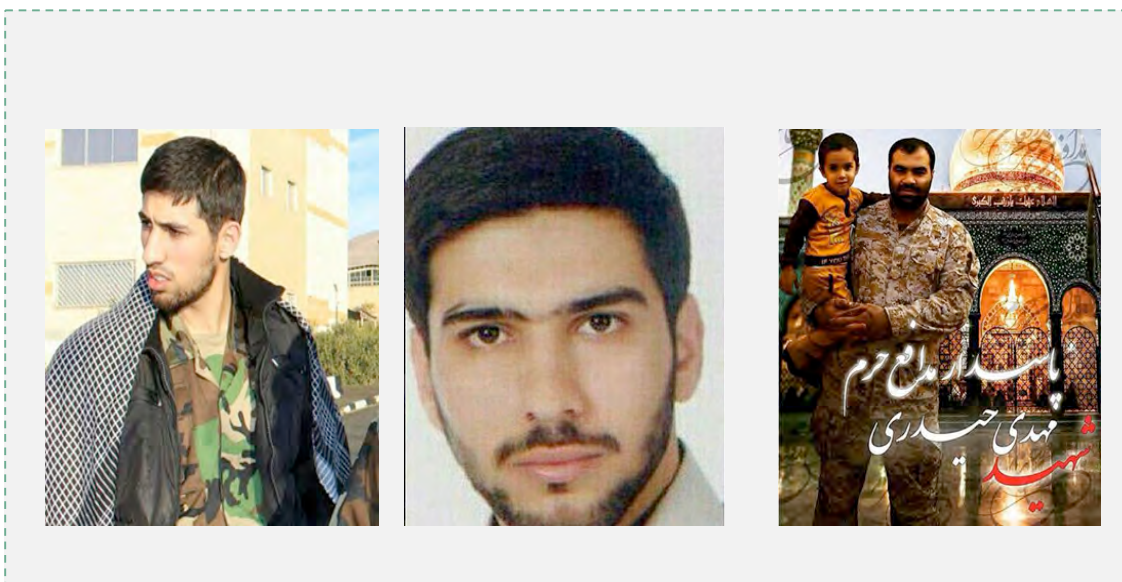
■ Ali Larijani, chairman of the Majlis (the Iranian parliament), visited Iraq last week. He told the Iraqi television channel Al-Iraqiya that as opposed to other Middle Eastern countries, which supported terrorist groups and denied doing so, Iran did not hide its support for Hezbollah. He said Hezbollah had been founded to struggle against the oppression of the "Zionist regime" and Iran supported both the organization and the Shi'ite militias in Iraq established to fight terrorism (Fars News, January 25, 2016).



Ali Larijani, chairman of the Majlis (Icana.ir, January 25, 2016).

Iranian Intervention in Syria and Lebanon

■ During the past two weeks the Iranian media reported the deaths of five more IRGC fighters in Syria. Since the beginning of the ground operation in northern Syria in October 2015 more than 135 IRGC fighters have been killed.



(Left to right) Mehdi Haidari, Ali Abdollahi and Meizam Nazari, recently killed in Syria (Defa Press, January 22, 2016).

■ For the first time since he was reported wounded in Syria, Qasem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, was seen in public. On January 21, 2016, he spoke at a memorial service for Brigadier General Mohammad-Ali Allahdadi, an IRGC officer killed on January 18, 2015, in an aerial attack near Quneitra (southern Golan Heights). The airstrike was attributed to Israel, whose objective was to foil Iran and Hezbollah's plan to establish an anti-Israel terrorist network on the Syrian border. Six Hezbollah operatives were also killed, including Jihad Mughnieh, son of Imad Mughnieh, former head of Hezbollah's military-terrorist wing. Qasem Soleimani said many thousands of fighters were currently defending the Shi'ite shrines in Syria from enemies of the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad (Fars News, January 21, 2016).



Qasem Soleimani at the memorial service for an officer killed on the Israeli-Syrian border (Facebook page affiliated with the IRGC, January 23, 2016).

■ Mohsen Kazemeini, IRGC commander in the Tehran Province, said the presence of the "defenders of the [Shi'ite] shrines" in Syria was necessary for defending the values of the Islamic Revolution and its founder, which were under attack from the West and the Zionists. Since the onset of the fighting in Syria, he said, 28 Iranian "advisors" from Tehran Province had been killed. He said that Iranian civilians wanting to go to Syria could enlist at Basij centers throughout the province, but only a small number from among those trained would be sent to Syria (Defa Press, January 26, 2016).

■ Several websites affiliated with the IRGC recently posted notices asking for donations for the fighters in Syria. According to the notices, Iranians could support the fighters in Syria by sending packages by mail, depositing funds in a bank account opened at the Melli Bank (number 02053646560060), or transferring funds online through the Behest.info website.



Call to Iranians to support the fighters in Syria (Modafeon.blog.ir, January 26, 2016).

■ Mohammad Fathali, Iranian ambassador to Lebanon, at a meeting with Samir Moqbel, the Lebanese defense minister, said that Iran was willing, more than ever, to equip the Lebanese army for its war on terrorism. He said "takfiri" terrorism was a product of the Zionist regime and that Lebanon and Iran had a major role in fighting it. The Lebanese defense minister said he planned to visit Iran in the near future, heading a delegation of high-ranking military officers, to discuss the Iranian offer of military support for the Lebanese army (Fars News, January 23, 2016).

Iranian Intervention in Iraq

- In the assessment of intelligence sources in the United States and Iraq, the three Americans who disappeared in Baghdad in the middle of January were abducted by Shi'ite militiamen associated with Iran. The three worked for a small private company under contract to the American army and were abducted from a private residence in southeastern Baghdad. According to American sources, however, Washington has no reason to believe Tehran was involved in the abduction or that the three are being held in Iran.. Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said he doubted Iran was involved in the affair. Meeting with American Secretary of State John Kerry in Davos, he said it was entirely unclear if their disappearance was in fact an abduction (Reuters, January 22, 2016).
- Last week Hossein Jaber Ansari, a spokesman for the Iranian foreign ministry, said that American Secretary of State John Kerry had asked Iran for help in locating the three Americans and that Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Iranian foreign minister, had promised Iran would do everything in its power to help (ISNA, January 25, 2016).

Iranian Intervention in Yemen

- A group of Shi'ite Houthi fighters wounded in the Yemeni civil war recently paid a visit to the shrine of Imam Reza² in the city of Mashhad in Iran (ABNA, January 18, 2016).



The wounded Yemeni fighters in Mashhad (ABNA, January 18, 2016).

² Home of the grave of the 8th century Shi'ite Imam Reza.

■ In the meantime, the Iranian media reported that the bodies of four Yemeni fighters had been buried in Iran. They were wounded in the civil war ten months ago and died in hospitals in Tehran. Because the Saudis objected to the bodies' being returned to Yemen, they were buried in the city of Amol in the Mazandaran Province on January 21, 2016. On January 21, 2016, the Digraban website reported that the Iranian foreign ministry had tried to prevent the burial of the four from being publicized to keep the diplomatic crisis between Iran and Saudi Arabia from escalating.



The four Yemeni fighters buried in Iran (ABNA, January 20, 2016).

Iranian Religious and Propagation Activities around the Globe

■ At the end of January Ayatollah Morteza Moqtadaei, chairman of the Supreme Council of Seminary Teachers in Qom, paid a three-day visit to the country of Georgia at the invitation of the prime minister's advisor and the head of the country's religious authority. The objective of his visit was to meet with Muslim clerics and examine possible religious collaboration; about 10% of Georgia's population is Muslim (IRNA, January 27, 2016).