



Spotlight on Iran¹

August 29 – September 11, 2016

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Main Points

- ✓ Senior Iranian officials recently stated that Iran would not agree to cut off the support Iran gave through the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) to the "resistance front" as part of the negotiations held with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).¹ The statements were in response to increasing criticism from opponents of President Hassan Rouhani to the negotiations with FATF, whose objective is to take Iran off the organization's blacklist. This past July Abbas Araghchi, Iran's deputy foreign minister, said Iran would not sacrifice Hezbollah on the altar of negotiations with FATF.
- ✓ At least six IRGC fighters were killed in Syria during the past two weeks, two of them high-ranking officers.
- ✓ Qasem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, went to south Aleppo this past week and met with fighters from the Iraqi Shi'ite Harakat al-Nujaba militia to discuss the military campaign waged by supporters of the Assad regime.
- ✓ Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi, leader of the Iraqi Shi'ite Harakat al-Nujaba militia, met with senior Iranian officials in Tehran. He said in an interview that the presence of Qods Force commander Qasem Soleimani was vital to the continuation of the military campaign against ISIS in Iraq.
- ✓ Kurdish sources in northern Iraq reported that an Iranian delegation had arrived in Iraq at the beginning of September to mediate internal disagreements between the two factions of the Patriotic Union of Kurds (PUK).
- ✓ A delegation of Iranian diplomats met with a Hamas representative in Beirut at the beginning of September to discuss developments in the Palestinian arena and Iran-Hamas relations. The head of the Iranian delegation said Iran would continue its support of the Palestinians against the "Zionist occupation."

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.

General Information

■ Hamid Mokhtas-Abadi, deputy commander of the Qods Force, said the Iranians fighting in Syria and Iraq were defending not only local shrines but rather "all humanity." He said the Europeans were in debt to the Iranian fighters, because without them many European capitals would today be occupied by takfiri terrorists. He said the Americans were well aware that the Iranians fighting in Syria and Iraq deserved medals for their fight against terrorism and defense of humanity (IRNA, August 30, 2016).



Hamid Mokhtas-Abadi (IRNA, August 30, 2016).

■ Mansour Haqiqatpour, advisor to the speaker of the Majlis (the Iranian parliament), said Iran would not agree to cut off the support the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) gave the "resistance front" as part of negotiations held with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). He said Iran regarded Hezbollah and Hamas as "freedom fighter" organizations and that Iran was committed to supporting them based on Islam, Islamic Revolution ideology and the Iranian constitution (Mehr, September 4, 2016).

■ Mohsen Kouhkan, member of the Majlis, also said Iran was determined to continue its support of the "resistance forces," especially Hezbollah. He said the agreement currently being worked out between Iran and FATF was a "Zionist-American plot" to sabotage Hezbollah and ensure Israel's security. Iran, he said, would not allow the Zionists to realize their plans (Tasnim, September 4, 2016).

■ The remarks of Haqiqatpour and Kouhkan were made in the midst of the growing criticism of Iranian president Rouhani's political rivals over the negotiations with

FATF. His rivals claim the Iranian government is prepared to agree to make extensive concessions to have Iran removed from the FATF blacklist. Criticism has recently increased in the wake of Iranian news reports that two Iranian banks, Bank Mellat and Bank Sepah, had announced they were suspending financial services to the Revolutionary Guards Khatam al-Anbiyah construction arm, due to the international economic sanctions imposed on IRGC-controlled bodies. Rouhani's opponents claimed the banks had made the announcements to pave the way for an Iran-FATF agreement.

■ In July 2016 Abbas Araghchi, deputy Iranian foreign minister, stated that Iran would not agree to sacrifice Hezbollah on the altar of the negotiations with FATF and would continue supporting the "axis of resistance." He said Iran regarded its security and national interests as a red line in the FATF negotiations and that supporting the "axis of resistance" was a top priority whose status would not be changed. He said there were other countries whose definition of "terrorism" differed from that of FATF (Fars, July 12, 2016). It is probable that despite the Iran-FATF negotiations, there will be no significant change in Iran's support of terrorist organizations, especially Hezbollah

■ Meeting with Claude Bartolone, president of the French National Assembly, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, chairman of the Iranian Expediency Discernment Council, claimed that without Iran, Baghdad and Damascus would have fallen to ISIS. He claimed the deterioration of the regional conditions provided fertile ground for the "Zionist regime" to commit more crimes and make greater threats (Mehr, September 7, 2016).



Bartolone and Rafsanjani (ILNA, September 6, 2016)

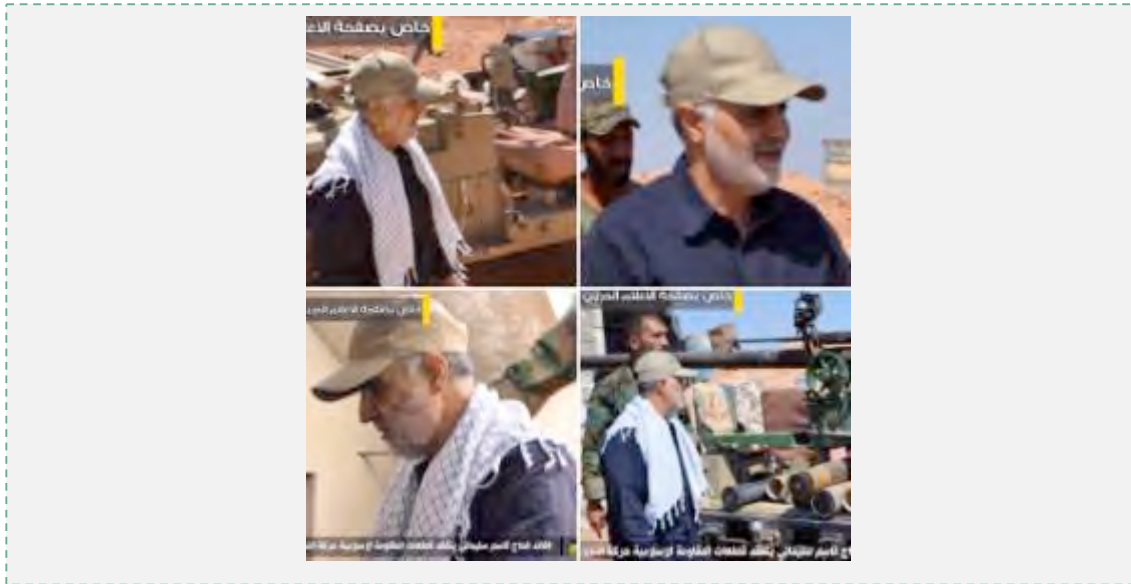
Iranian Intervention in Syria and Lebanon

- At least six IRGC fighters were killed in Syria during the past two weeks. Among them were two officers: Ahmad Gholami, who served as a high-ranking IRGC commander during the Iran-Iraq War, was killed near Aleppo; and Dariush Dorosti, was killed in the city of Hamat.



Ahmad Gholami, IRGC commander, killed in Syria (Fars, August 31, 2016)

- Qasem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, went to south Aleppo last week. In allegedly recent photos posted by Iranian websites and social networks on September 6, 2016, Soleimani appeared with fighters from the Iraqi Shi'ite Harakat al-Nujaba militia, which is operating in Syria. Syrian military sources reported that Soleimani had come to discuss details of the military offensive waged in south Aleppo by supporters of the Assad regime (Al-Masdar News, September 7, 2016).



Qasem Soleimani in south Aleppo (Twitter account, September 6, 2016)

■ Ali Balvi, municipal council chairman of the Syrian Shi'ite town of Nubl, said that humanitarian aid from Iran had been distributed to the residents of Nubl and al-Zahra in the Aleppo district. On September 3, 2016, the Iranian news agency Fars reported that in June 2016 Doctors Without Borders had appealed to Iran for medical assistance for the towns that had been under siege by the rebels. They were liberated in February 2016 by the Syrian forces with the aid of Iran and Hezbollah. In the middle of May 2016 the deputy director of the Iranian Red Crescent reported that during the past year Iran had sent more than 46 tons of humanitarian aid to Syria, including food, tents and blankets.

Iranian Intervention in Iraq

■ Sheikh Akram al-Kaabi, leader of the Iraqi Shi'ite Harakat al-Nujaba militia, said in an interview with Tasnim News that the presence in Iraq of Qasem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, was vital to the continuation of the country's military campaign against ISIS. He said Soleimani had officially been invited to Iraq by the Iraqi government and that he was providing advice for all its military actions. "Qasem Soleimani," he said, "is part of the resistance front all over the globe." Al-Kaabi, who went to Tehran at the end of August and met with senior Iranian officials, said that the Shi'ite militias in Iraq were capable of liberating Mosul without help from foreigners. He added that they had already been victorious over ISIS by virtue of the fact that they had been established on the model of the Basij forces (the Iranian paramilitary militia). He said that even after the liberation of Mosul the militias would continue operating, either under their current name or with another (Tasnim, August 28, 2016).

■ Ali-Akbar Velayati, advisor to the Iranian supreme leader for international affairs, met with al-Kaabi on September 1, 2016. He told al-Kaabi that Iran's supreme leader had granted the Iraqi government's official request for aid. He said that cooperation between Iran and Iraq could rescue the region from the United States and the "Zionist regime." Without such cooperation, he said, Syria could not be saved, and without cooperation between Iran, Iraq and Syria, Lebanon could not be saved. He called it a "chain of resistance," and if even one link was missing the entire chain would break. He said the participation of the Iraqi Shi'ite militias in the upcoming campaign to liberate Mosul was important, adding that cities the militias had helped liberate remained almost intact while cities where the Americans had participated in the liberation had been destroyed (ISNA, September 2, 2016).



Al-Kaabi and Ali-Akbar Velayati (Tasnim, September 1, 2016).

■ Kurdish sources in northern Iraq reported that an Iranian delegation had arrived in Sulemaniya in northern Iraq on September 2, 2016, to mediate the internal disagreements that had recently arisen between the two factions of the Patriotic Union of Kurds (PUK). The members of the delegation met separately with representatives of both factions in an effort to reach a compromise (Rudaw, September 2, 2016).

Iranian Intervention in the Palestinian Arena

■ An Iranian diplomatic delegation headed by Mohammad Majidi, first advisor of the Iran embassy in Lebanon, met with Ali Barakeh, Hamas representative in Beirut. They discussed developments in the Palestinian arena and Hamas-Iran relations. Barakeh noted the importance of strengthening Hamas' relations with Iran in

supporting the "resistance of Palestine." Majidi said that Iran would continue supporting the Palestinians against the "Zionist occupation" to put an end to the siege of the Gaza Strip and defend Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa mosque (IRNA, September 1, 2016).



The Iranian delegation meets with Hamas' representative in Beirut (IRNA, September 1, 2016).