



Spotlight on Iran¹

September 25 – October 9, 2016

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Main Points

- ✓ At least three Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) fighters were killed in Syria, one of them a lieutenant colonel in the Saberin special forces brigade.
- ✓ Qasem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, spoke at a ceremony held to mark the first anniversary of the death of Hossein Hamedani, a senior official in the IRGC killed in Syria. He said the Iranians fighting in Syria defended not only Syria but Islam and the Islamic Republic. He added that the main reason for Iran's support of Syria was Syria's support for Iran in the Iran-Iraq War.
- ✓ Chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces said Iran had recently attacked targets in Iraq and Syria using long-range UAVs.
- ✓ Hadiya Khalaf Abbas, speaker of the People's Council of Syria, visited Iran at the end of September and met with senior Iranian officials. Ali-Akbar Velayati, advisor to the Iranian supreme leader for international affairs, told her that Iran would support Syria "until victory has finally been achieved," according to the supreme leader's orders.
- ✓ The advisor to the Majlis (the Iranian parliament) for international affairs said that in recent months Iran and Russia had countered American efforts to force them to end their support for Bashar Assad and to agree that he would not be a part of Syria's future.
- ✓ Masoud Barzani, president of the Kurdish autonomous region in northern Iraq, is expected to pay an official visit to Tehran on October 12-13, 2016.
- ✓ Iran foreign ministry's spokesman claimed Iran would never agree to recognize Israel or stop its support of the Palestinians. The remarks were made in response to an interview with Sigmar Gabriel, the German minister for economic affairs, which appeared in Der Spiegel on the eve of his visit to Tehran. Gabriel said that Iran's recognition of Israel was a precondition for the normalization of German-Iranian relations. In retaliation the Iranian foreign minister refused to meet with him.
- ✓ Tehran held its annual "festival of resistance films," during which dozens of anti-Israel, anti-ISIS anti-Saudi Arabia and anti-American films were presented. At the end of the festival the commanders of the IRGC and the Basij awarded the "Man of the Resistance, 2016" prize to the leader of the Shi'ite Houthis in Yemen.
- ✓ Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iranian foreign minister, gave a speech in the Majlis defending his foreign policy. He said he was proud that Qasem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force; Hassan Nasrallah, secretary general of Hezbollah; and Ramadan Shallah, head of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) called him every day to thank him for Iran's foreign policy.

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

■ Qasem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, spoke at a ceremony held to mark the first anniversary of the death of Hossein Hamedani, a senior official in the IRGC killed in Syria. He said the main reason for Iran's support of Syria was Syria's support of Iran in the Iran-Iraq War. He said the Iranians fighting in Syria defended not only Syria but Islam and the Islamic Republic, adding that ISIS and the *takfiri* Islamic groups had been established to fight Iran, not Syria. He also said that like Iran, the Shi'ite militias in Iraq and Ansar Allah (the Shi'ite Houthis) in Yemen were today continuing the path of the third Shi'ite Imam Hossein, killed with his followers in the battle of Karbala in 680 A.D.



Qasem Soleimani speaking at a ceremony to mark the first anniversary of the death of Hossein Hamedani (Tasnim, October 5, 2016)

■ Mohammad Bagheri, chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces, said Iran had recently used long-range UAVs to attack targets in Iraq and Syria. Speaking at the opening of the academic year of Iran's Supreme National Defense University in Tehran, he said the UAVs had made precision attacks on targets of one square meter, a military capability possessed by only a few countries. He said Russia was helping Iran develop the technology necessary for the war on terrorism in Syria and Iraq (Fars, September 25, 2016).

■ Morteza Qorbani, senior advisor to the Iran's chief of staff, said in an interview with Iranian news agency Mehr that by establishing the "resistance front" in Syria, Iraq, Yemen and the Gaza Strip, Iran had foiled Western intentions to occupy Syria, defeat Hezbollah and eventually topple the Iranian regime. He said Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Revolution, had not achieved the liberation of Karbala and

Jerusalem during his lifetime, but with the help of Allah, in the near future the holy cities of Jerusalem, Mecca and al-Madinah would be liberated (Mehr, September 27, 2016).



Morteza Qorbani (Mehr, September 27, 2016)

■ The 14th annual "festival of resistance films" was held in Tehran at the end of September 2016. The closing ceremony was held on September 30 and attended by Mohammad Ali Jafari, commander of the IRGC, and Mohammed Reza Naqdi, commander of the IRGC's Basij militia. They awarded the "Man of the Resistance, 2016" prize to the leader of Yemen's Houthis Abdul-Malik al-Houthi. Also in attendance were Fatemeh Mughnieh, the daughter of Imad Mughnieh (killed in Syria in 2008), and Zaynab Soleimani, the daughter of Qasem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force. Dozens of anti-Israeli, anti-Zionist anti-ISIS, anti-Saudi Arabia and anti-American films were presented at the festival (Fars, September 30, 2016).



The commanders of the IRGC (center) and the Basij (right) present the "Man of the Resistance" award to Abdullah al-Marwani, Yemenite Houthi representative (Fars, September 30, 2016).

■ Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Iranian foreign minister, gave a speech to the Majlis where he said he was proud that Qasem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force; Hassan Nasrallah, secretary general of Hezbollah; and Ramadan Shallah, leader of the PIJ called him daily to thank him for Iran's foreign policy. He also said that he was personally opposed to holding an international Holocaust convention in Tehran because it would only serve the interests of the "Zionist regime" and not the Palestinian people (Entekhab, October 2, 2016).

Iranian Intervention in Syria and Lebanon

■ At least three IRGC fighters were killed in Syria during the past two weeks. One was Mohammad Reza Zare' Alvani, a lieutenant colonel in the Saber special forces brigade.



Mohammad Reza Zare' Alvani (Twitter, September 28, 2016)

- Hadiya Khalaf Abbas, the speaker of the Syrian parliament, visited Iran on September 26, 2016. While there she met with senior Iranian officials to discuss developments in Syria. Ali Larijani, speaker of the Iranian Majlis, said the United States was fraudulent in its dealings with the ceasefire in Syria and the American attack on the Syrian army posts in Deir al-Zor proved that the United States supported the terrorists. He claimed Iran supported a diplomatic solution to the crisis in Syria (Tasnim, September 26, 2016).
- Ali-Akbar Velayati, advisor to the Iranian supreme leader for international affairs, told Abbas that Iran would continue its support of Syria "until victory has finally been achieved." He said the supreme leader had put the defense of Syria on Iran's agenda and that the Iranian government was providing Syria with the necessary support (Tasnim, September 26, 2016).
- Iranian President Hassan Rouhani also promised Abbas that Iran would continue providing Syria with support to fight terrorism. He said Iran regarded the preservation of the territorial integrity of the regional countries, Syria among them, as a fundamental principle, and that the Syrians had to be helped to rid their country of terrorism (Tasnim, September 27, 2016).



Hadiya Khalaf Abbas meets with Hassan Rouhani (Tasnim, September 27, 2016)

■ Alaeddin Boroujerdi, chairman the Majlis national security and foreign policy committee, said the United States should know that Iran, Syria and Russia's joint anti-terrorism policy was fixed and could not be changed. He made the statement in reply to an American announcement of the suspension of contacts with Russia regarding the war in Syria because Moscow had not honored its commitments during the last ceasefire. He claimed American foreign policy in Syria showed open support for terrorist groups and that the United States used the ceasefire to strengthen those groups (Fars, October 4, 2016).

■ Hossein Amir Abdollahian, international affairs advisor to the speaker of the Majlis, claimed Iran and Russia had successfully countered American efforts to end Iranian-Russian support for Syrian President Bashar Assad. He said during his meeting with the speaker of the Syrian parliament that in recent months the United States had indirectly tried to convince Iran to agree that Assad should not be a part of Syria's future. He added that the continued refusal of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to negotiate with the United States on regional issues had prevented America from forcing Iran to stop supporting Assad (Fars, September 28, 2016).

Iranian Intervention in Iraq Iranian Intervention in Yemen

■ On October 1, 2016, the Iranian Fars news agency reported that Masoud Barzani, president of the Kurdish autonomous region in northern Iraq, and Nechervan Idris Barzani, prime minister of the Kurdistan regional government, would pay an official visit to Tehran on October 12-13, 2016. They will meet with senior Iranian officials to

discuss bilateral relations and the fight against terrorism, in preparation for the campaign to liberate the Iraqi city Mosul from ISIS.

- The London-based newspaper al-Sharq al-Awsat reported on September 30, 2016, that the leaders of the Sunni Arab tribes in northern Iraq opposed the intervention of Iran and the Iranian-supported Shi'ite militias in the upcoming campaign to liberate Mosul. A tribal leader from Nineveh Province said the Arab tribes in Mosul and Nineveh would not stand for an Iranian presence in the region.

- Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council, met with Rajah al-Musawi, Iraq's ambassador to Tehran. Rafsanjani said he welcomed ISIS's retreat from Iraq but added that Iraq's enemies would continue trying to divide the country and cause internal disputes among Iraqi Shi'ites to weaken their influence. He said that dividing Iraq between Shi'ites, Sunnis, Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen would damage its territorial integrity and turn it into three small, weak states (IRNA, October 4, 2016).



Iraqi ambassador Musawi (left) and Rafsanjani (IRNA, October 4, 2016)

- Ali-Akbar Velayati, advisor to the Iranian supreme leader for international affairs, also met with the Iraqi ambassador. Velayati told Musawi that their enemies sought to weaken the ties between the two countries. He said that their close ties were based on a common religion, history and culture. The two discussed bilateral relations and international and regional cooperation (Tasnim, October 3, 2016).

- Velayati also met last week with an EU delegation visiting Tehran. They discussed the upcoming campaign to liberate Mosul from ISIS, and he told the delegates that Iran did not intend to participate actively in the fighting. He said Iran's military

presence in Iraq was limited to advising the Iraqi government, without intervention. He also said that the approaching visit to Iran of Masoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdish autonomous region in Iraq, was not related to the campaign for Mosul and that Barzani was coming to Iran as the regional leader of northern Iraq and as an old friend of Iran (Tasnim, October 5, 2016).

Iranian Intervention in the Palestinian Arena

- Iran informed Germany that it would never accept recognition of the State of Israel or ending Iranian support of the Palestinians as conditions for the normalization of relations between Tehran and Berlin. Bahram Qasemi, spokesman for the Iranian foreign ministry, said the relations between Iran and Germany were based on mutual respect and common interests, and that Iran would not agree to preconditions in its relations with Berlin. He said Iran's support for the Palestinian cause and defense of the Palestinian people's rights were fundamental to its foreign policy (Press News, October 1, 2016). Qasemi made the remarks in response to an interview given by Sigmar Gabriel, the German minister for economic affairs, to Der Spiegel on the eve of his visit to Tehran. Gabriel said that Iran's recognition of Israel was a precondition for the normalization of German-Iranian relations.
- Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Iranian foreign minister, also responding to Minister Gabriel, said that Iran was independent and no other country could dictate terms to it. He told newspaper correspondents that Iran's foreign policy was fixed and based on Iran's ideology, and that visitors to Tehran were aware of the situation (Fars, October 2, 2016). The Iranian media reported that in protest to the German minister's remarks, Zarif refused to meet with him during his visit to Tehran (Mehr, October 4, 2016).
- Senior Hamas official Ismail Radwan told the Lebanese TV station al-Mayadeen that that Hamas' relations with Iran had not been broken off and that Hamas needed Iran's continuing support of the "Palestinian resistance" (Tasnim, October 2, 2016).