



Spotlight on Iran¹

October 23 – November 6, 2016

Editor: Dr. Raz Zimmt



Main Points

- ✓ Four Iranians, two of them high-ranking officers, were killed by rebels in Syria. They died during the attack begun by Syrian rebel organizations in Aleppo aimed at breaking the Syrian forces' siege of the city's eastern neighborhoods.
- ✓ Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, meeting with families of Iranian fighters killed in Syria, said he was particularly proud of the Iranian martyrs killed while defending Shi'ite shrines in Syria.
- ✓ Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Iranian foreign minister, met in Moscow with the foreign ministers of Russia and Syria to discuss the ongoing fighting in Syria.
- ✓ Iran welcomed the election of Michel Aoun as president of Lebanon. Ali-Akbar Velayati, senior advisor to the Iranian supreme leader for international affairs, said Aoun's election was a victory for the Islamic resistance and Hezbollah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah.
- ✓ Qasem Soleimani, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' (IRGC) Qods Force returned to Iran from a visit to Iraq. While there he visited the operations room of the Shi'ite militias, where preparations were being made to attack the Tal Afar region (west of Mosul). Before going to Tal Afar he paid a visit to Erbil, located in the Kurdish autonomous region in northern Iraq.
- ✓ Senior Iranian officials strongly criticized Turkey for deploying forces in northern Iraq and Ankara's demand for active participation in the liberation of Mosul, despite the opposition of the Iraqi government. Iranian president Rouhani warned against foreign intervention in Syria and Iraq. The Iranian media strongly slammed Turkey and its president, and claimed a Turkish military presence in northern Iraq was a serious threat to Iran. They claimed such a presence served the interests of the United States, which sought to partition Iraq.
- ✓ Iranian foreign minister Zarif met in Tehran with the head of the political bureau of the Kurdish Patriotic Union (PUK) to discuss developments in Iraq.
- ✓ Sadeq Larijani, head of Iran's judiciary, paid a visit to Iraq where he met with the heads of the Iraqi judicial system and senior Shi'ite clerics led by Ayatollah Ali Sistani.

Iranian Intervention in Syria and Lebanon

- Four Iranians were killed in the fighting in Syria during the past two weeks, two of them high-ranking military officers: Gholam-Reza Samaei, a senior officer in the

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.

IRGC and a veteran of the Iran-Iraq War, and Zaker Hosseini, a senior advisor to the IRGC commander in Tabriz.

- On October 29, 2016, Syrian opposition sources claimed another senior IRGC officer, Mohammad Ali Mohammad Hosseini, had been killed in Syria. However, Iran denied that Hosseini, formerly commander of the IRGC's Imam Sajjad Brigade, had been killed by Syrian rebels. Iran claimed he had not been killed in Syria at all, but had died of a heart attack (qasemsoleimani.ir, October 29, 2016).

- The Iranian losses were the outcome of the renewal of fighting in the Aleppo area. Last week the Syrian rebel organizations, led by the Fateh al-Sham Front, attacked Aleppo and took control of neighborhoods in the west and south. Their objective was to break the siege imposed by the Syrian forces on the city's eastern neighborhoods.



IRGC officer Gholam-Reza Samaei, killed in the fighting in Syria (Fars, October 27, 2016).

- On November 1, 2016, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei met with the families of Iranian fighters who had been killed in Syria. He told them he was particularly proud of the Iranian martyrs killed while defending Shi'ite shrines in Syria (Fars, November 1, 2016).



Ali Khamenei meets with the families of Iranians killed fighting in Syria (Website of Ali Khamenei, November 1, 2016).

- Abbas Araghchi, deputy Iranian foreign minister, claimed that without Iranian support, terrorists would have taken control of Baghdad and Damascus. At an international conference of young Muslims in Mashad he said Iran demanded the countries supporting terrorism end their support and fight terrorism instead (Mehr, October 26, 2016).
- On October 28, 2016, Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Iranian foreign minister, met in Moscow with Sergey Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister, and Walid al-Muallem, the Syrian foreign minister. Zarif said the only possible solution for the ongoing crisis in Syria was political, accompanied by fighting the Islamic terrorist groups. He said resolving the human tragedies in Syria and Yemen demanded extensive collaboration between Tehran and Moscow (IRNA and Tasnim News, October 28, 2016).
- Iran welcomed the election of Michel Aoun as president of Lebanon. Bahram Qasemi, a spokesman for the Iranian foreign ministry, said the agreement of Lebanon's political factions on Aoun as president was an important step towards political stability. He added that he hoped relations between Iran and Lebanon would increase (Fars, October 31, 2016).
- Iranian president Hassan Rouhani contacted Michel Aoun shortly after the election to congratulate him. He said Iran was certain his presidency would strengthen Lebanese resistance to the main regional threats, which he claimed were the *takfiri* terrorist groups and the "Zionist occupation." He said Iran wanted to broaden relations between the two countries in every area (IRNA, October 31, 2016).
- On October 31, 2016, Ali-Akbar Velayati, advisor to the Iranian supreme leader for international affairs, told the Tasnim news agency that Aoun's election as president of

Lebanon was a victory for the Islamic resistance and for Hezbollah secretary general Hassan Nasrallah.



"The victory of the resistance in the Lebanese elections" (Fars, October 31, 2016).

Iranian Intervention in Iraq

■ On October 26, 2016, Iraqi sources told the newspaper al-Akhbar that the previous week Qasem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, had visited the operations room of the Iraqi Shi'ite militias in preparation for their operation in the Tal Afar region to the west of Mosul. Before Tal Afar he went to Irbil in the Kurdish autonomous region in northern Iraq.



Qasem Soleimani with the family of a Kurdish Peshmerga commander killed by ISIS in 2015 (Mehr, October 23, 2016).

■ Qasem Soleimani returned to Iran from Iraq where he made a number of media-covered visits to the families of Iranian fighters killed in Syria, and to wounded IRGC fighters.



Soleimani (second from right) with the family of Yadollahi Monfared, an officer in the Iranian army who was killed in Syria in April 2016 (Mashreq News, October 27, 2016).

■ Senior Iranian officials strongly criticized Turkey for deploying forces in northern Iraq, and for Ankara's demand for active participation in the campaign for the liberation of Mosul, despite the opposition of the Iraqi government. Bahram Qasemi, a spokesman for the Iranian foreign ministry, warned Turkey not to violate Iraqi sovereignty. He said, "The fight against terrorism, in the region and around the globe, is good, but the sovereignty of another state must not be violated." He said all those fighting terrorism had to coordinate with the central government in Baghdad (Fars, October 24, 2016). Iranian president Hassan Rouhani also warned against foreign intervention in Syria and Iraq. Speaking during a visit to Markazi Province, he said that foreign intervention without prior coordination with the host country was very dangerous. He called on the regional countries to respect territorial integrity because global changes could be very dangerous (Press TV, October 24, 2016).

■ After the measures taken by Turkey in northern Iraq, the Iranian media renewed their attacks on Turkey and its president, Erdogan. On October 26, 2016, the conservative Jomhuri-ye Eslami published an editorial entitled, "Sultan Erdogan's whims to revive the Ottoman Empire," attacking him and warning his fate would be the same as Saddam Hussein's. Erdogan, according to the editorial, "cried crocodile tears" over the fate of the Sunnis in Mosul and Aleppo, but in reality he was fully aware that his support for ISIS was responsible for the atrocities and crimes in Syria

and Iraq. Even the Zionists and other enemies of Islam did not dream of committing such atrocities, said the editorial. Commentary in the Iranian press over the past two weeks warned that the Turkish military presence in northern Iraq posed a serious threat to Iran and served the interests of the United States, which sought to partition Iraq.

■ On October 30, 2016, Ali-Akbar Velayati told the Kurdish network Rudaw that Iran was prepared to mediate between Iraq and Turkey to prevent them from declaring war on one another. He said Turkey's intervention in Iraq and Syria would endanger Turkey's economic progress.

■ On October 31, 2016, Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Iranian foreign minister, met in northern Iraq with Mala Bakhtiar, head of the Kurdish PUK's political bureau. They discussed developments in Iraq, especially the campaign for the liberation of Mosul. Zarif stressed the need for unity among Iraq's ethnic and sectarian groups (Mehr, October 31, 2016).



Mohammad Javad Zarif meets with Mala Bakhtiar (Tasnim, October 31, 2016).

■ Last week Ayatollah Sadegh Amoli Larijani, head of the Iranian judiciary, paid a visit to Iraq to sign agreements for cooperation with the Iraqi judicial system. He held a press conference in Baghdad where he said he supported the ongoing fight against terrorism in Iraq. He said that increased cooperation between the two judicial systems would strengthen bilateral political activity (Mizan News, October 30, 2016). While in Iraq Larijani met with senior Iraqi Shi'ite clerics, led by Ayatollah Ali Sistani.



The meeting of the head of the Iranian and Iraq judicial systems (Mizan News, October 30, 2016).