



**Spotlight on Iran<sup>1</sup>**  
**November 7-20, 2016**  
**Editor: Dr. Raz Zimmt**



## Main Points

- ✓ Three Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) fighters were killed in Syria. In addition, a correspondent for Iranian broadcasting was killed by mortar fire in Aleppo, and an Iranian TV cameraman was wounded in the same attack.
- ✓ Faysal Meqdad, the Syrian deputy foreign minister, paid a visit to Tehran and met with senior Iranian officials. Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, advisor to the speaker of the Majlis (the Iranian parliament) for international affairs, told him Iran would continue to support Syria in its fight against terrorism.
- ✓ Mohammad Bagheri, the Iranian chief of staff, said that a number of years ago Iran had built a factory for the manufacture of missiles in the region of Aleppo, and that during the Second Lebanon War the missiles produced there had been used to attack Israel. Several months ago Hossein Sheikholeslam, advisor to the Iranian foreign minister, also stated that Iran had built a factory for the manufacture of missiles used by Hezbollah to attack Israel. This past week he claimed Iran had not limited itself to missile production in Syria, but had spread the technology and necessary information in territories bordering on Israel.
- ✓ A senior official in the Iranian foreign ministry said that in the near future Iran would appoint a temporary chargé d'affaires for its embassy in Syria. He would serve until Iran appointed a permanent ambassador, which would be done in the coming months. Last month Mohammad-Reza Raouf-Sheibani ended his five-year term as Iranian ambassador to Syria and a replacement has not yet been appointed.
- ✓ On November 7 and 8, 2016, Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Iranian foreign minister, paid a visit to Lebanon. He met for the first time with Michel Aoun, the newly-elected Lebanese president, and with other senior Lebanese officials, including Hassan Nasrallah, secretary general of Hezbollah.
- ✓ Iranian police patrol cars were recently dispatched to Iraq, apparently to reinforce the security of the approximately two million Iranian pilgrims in Shi'ite cities in Iraq for the fortieth day after the anniversary of the martyrdom of Shi'ite Imam Hussein ibn-Ali.
- ✓ On November 13, 2016, Haidar al-Abadi, vice president of Iraq, paid a visit to Tehran. He met with senior Iranian officials and discussed political developments in Iraq and the ongoing campaign against ISIS.

<sup>1</sup> 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.

## Iranian Intervention in Syria and Lebanon

■ During the past two weeks three IRGC fighters were killed fighting in Aleppo, Syria. Also killed was Mohsen Khazaei, correspondent for the Iranian broadcasting company; he was killed by mortar fire. An Iranian TV cameraman was wounded in the same attack (Fars, November 12, 2016).



**Mohsen Khazaei (left) and Qasem Soleimani, commander of the IRGC's Qods Force (Fars, November 12, 2016)**

■ On November 7, 2016, Faysal Meqdad, Syrian deputy foreign minister, paid a visit to Tehran where he met with senior Iranian officials. Ali Larijani, speaker of the Majlis, told him Syria was in the front lines of the resistance to Zionism and terrorism. He stressed the need for greater political, economic and parliamentary ties between Iran and Syria (Mehr, November 7, 2016).

■ Ali-Akbar Velayati, advisor to the Iranian supreme leader for international affairs, told Meqdad that America would never realize its dream of partitioning Syria and Iraq. Meqdad stated that the Syrian government was determined to continue the campaign against terrorism, and relied on support from Iran (IRNA, November 7, 2016). Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, advisor to the speaker of the Majlis for international affairs, told Meqdad that Iran would continue to support Syria in its fight against terrorism (ILNA, November 9, 2016).

■ Mohammad Bagheri, chief of staff of the Iranian armed forces, said that a number of years ago Iran had built a factory for the manufacture of missiles near Aleppo, and that during the Second Lebanon War the missiles produced there had been used to attack

Israel (Tasnim, November 10, 2016). Several months ago Hossein Sheikholeslam, advisor to the Iranian foreign minister, also stated that as part of its military support for Lebanon, Iran had built a factory for the manufacture of missiles, which Hezbollah had used to attack Israel (Tasnim, August 3, 2016).

■ This past week Sheikholeslam again noted the support Iran gave to regional countries in the form of missile-producing facilities. On November 12, 2016, Mizan News reported his saying that since the Islamic Revolution, Iran had based its strategy on the destruction of the "Zionist regime." Iran's policies, he claimed, made it clear to Israel that the response to any Israeli mistake would be harsh. To that end, he claimed, Iran needed hundreds of thousands of missiles that could strike anywhere in Israel, including its important and sensitive centers. Iran, he said, was aware of Israel's missile-interception capabilities, and therefore had created conditions making it possible to launch 500 missiles at Israel at the same time. Thus even if Israel intercepted 100 of them, 400 would still hit their targets. He added that Iran's missile capabilities prevented Israel and its allies from carrying out their plans to strike Iran's nuclear facilities. He said that missile-manufacture capabilities supplied by Iran were not limited to Syria, and that Iran had given the necessary technology and information wherever it could in territories bordering Israel.



Hossein Sheikholeslam (ana.ir, November 3, 2016)

■ In the meantime, Amir Ali Hajizadeh, head of the IRGC aerospace and missile force, gave a speech at the Amir Kabir University in Tehran. He said the United States had destroyed a weapons factory built by Iran in Aleppo whose manufacture included surface-to-surface missiles. He did not provide further details about the incident (ISNA, November 14, 2016).

- Last week Mohammed Reza Naqdi, commander of the IRGC's Basij militia, denied reports that thousands of Iranian fighters had been deployed to Syria. He claimed that Iran had not deployed military forces to Syria and that Iranian presence in Syria and Iraq was limited to advisors, sent to enable local fighters to profit from their experience (Elaph, November 16, 2016).
- On November 13, 2016, Mohammad Irani, director general for Middle East affairs in the Iranian foreign ministry, told Tasnim News that in the near future Iran would appoint a temporary chargé d'affaires for its embassy in Syria. He said that because the issue of the Iranian embassy in Damascus was important and sensitive, a temporary charge d'affaires would be appointed until a decision could be made regarding the appointment of a new ambassador. That would occur, he said, in the coming months. Last month Mohammad-Reza Raouf-Sheibani ended his five-year term as Iranian ambassador to Syria. The Iranian media reported that his likely successor would be Hossein Sheikholeslam, who served as ambassador to Syria from 1998 to 2003, and is today an advisor to the defense minister. However, the report has not been officially confirmed.
- On November 7 and 8, 2016, Mohammad Javad Zarif, foreign minister of Iran, paid a visit to Lebanon where he met with senior Lebanese officials, among them Michel Aoun, the recently-elected president; Tammam Salam, the prime minister; Gebran Bassil, the foreign minister; and Hassan Nasrallah, secretary general of Hezbollah. Meeting with other diplomats and Iranian representatives in Lebanon, Zarif said Hezbollah and Nasrallah stood at the head of and were the symbols of the resistance, and a source of pride (Tasnim, November 8, 2016).



**Zarif (left) meets with Nasrallah (Elaph, November 8, 2016)**

## Iranian Intervention in Iraq

- This past week videos were posted to the Iraqi social networks showing Iranian patrol cars marked "Tehran police" on the roads in Iraq. They were apparently dispatched to reinforce the security of the approximately two million Iranian pilgrims in the holy Shi'ite cities in Iraq for the fortieth day after the anniversary of the martyrdom of Shi'ite Imam Hussein ibn-Ali.
- Civilian organizations in Najaf opposing Iranian intervention in Iraq posted the pictures, saying that "Despite Iraqis' opposition to Iranian intervention...the Iranian authorities have only contempt for the Iraqi people and challenge Iraq's sovereignty and honor....the Iranian security forces drive through Iraqi streets and supervise traffic as though they were in Qom or Tehran" (Facebook page of a prominent political activist in Najaf, November 16, 2016).
- On November 13, 2016, Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iranian foreign minister, met with Khazir al-Khazaei, Iraqi vice president. They discussed political developments in Iraq and the ongoing campaign against ISIS. While in Tehran al-Khazaei also met with Ali Larijani, speaker of the Iranian Majlis (Mehr, November 13, 2016).



**Zarif (right) meets with al-Khazaei (Mehr, November 13, 2016)**

- Ali-Akbar Velayati, advisor to the Iranian supreme leader for international affairs, met with Hervé Morin, the former French minister of defense. He told Morin that Iran opposed any attempt to change the borders of the Middle East or partition regional countries. He said one of the reasons Iranian advisors were in Iraq was the effort made by the terrorists to partition the country and take control of it. He added that to a large extent regional peace and stability depended on cooperation between Iran and Iraq,

and that the pilgrimage of millions of Iranians to Iraq and of millions of Iraqis to Iran proved the countries' close relations. He said he was confident of the liberation of Mosul from ISIS and of the defeat of the terrorists, but said it was liable to take time (Mehr, November 15, 2016).

■ Haidar al-Abadi, Iraqi prime minister, denied reports that Iranians and Jordanians were participating in the fighting against ISIS in Iraq. At a press conference in Baghdad he said Iraq had asked its neighbors and the rest of the world as well to send arms and supply it with intelligence regarding the activities of the terrorists in Iraqi territory. However, he said, so far Iraq had not allowed armed forces, with the exception of the international coalition, to participate in the military campaign (Khabar Online, November 16, 2016).