



Spotlight on Iran¹

January 30, 2016 – February 12, 2017

Editor: Dr. Raz Zimmt



Main Points

- ✓ Ali-Akbar Velayati, advisor to the Iranian supreme leader for international affairs, said Iran would welcome any just ceasefire recognized by the Syrian people and the country's legal government. He reiterated Iran's official position that the resolution of the crisis in Syria had to preserve the country's territorial integrity and end the intervention of countries operating in Syria without its government's authorization.
- ✓ Mohsen Rezaei, secretary of the Iranian Expediency Council and former Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) commander, justified Iranian military intervention in Syria, claiming IRGC commanders who served as military advisors on Mediterranean coast [i.e., Syria] kept Iranian enemies from its borders.
- ✓ An IRGC fighter was killed when a mine exploded near the T4 military base in the Homs Governate of Syria. A senior IRGC advisor was killed in Mosul, Iraq.
- ✓ Iran and Russia continue consultations on developments in Syria following the Astana talks. At the beginning of February the Russian president's special envoy for Syrian affairs arrived in Tehran and met with Ali Shamkhani, the secretary of the Supreme Council for National Security. Shamkhani said that Iran was committed to finding a political resolution for the crisis in Syria and supported a military solution only against groups unwilling to lay down their arms. Shamkhani, meeting with French foreign minister, who paid a visit to Tehran at the end of January 2017, rejected the establishment of safe zones in Syria, claiming they would encourage Syria's disintegration and strengthen terrorism. On February 8, 2017, Abbas Araghchi, the deputy Iranian foreign minister, went to Moscow, where he met with the Russian deputy foreign minister to discuss the situation in Syria and the nuclear agreement.
- ✓ Sami Abu Zuhri, Hamas spokesman in the Gaza Strip, said that Hamas had recently been in contact with Iran to strengthen bilateral relations. He said he hoped there would be a positive outcome. Ismail Radwan, a senior Hamas official, interviewed by the Iranian Tasnim News agency's correspondent in Gaza, claimed Hamas' relations with Iran and Hezbollah had never been broken off and would not be in the future, despite political differences.
- ✓ On January 28, 2017, Tasnim News reported what it claimed was a documentation of tunnels dug from the Gaza Strip to an Israel army base. A video was shown of an interview with operatives of the "Mujahideen Battalions."

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

■ Ali-Akbar Velayati, advisor to the Iranian supreme leader for international affairs, said Iran would welcome any just ceasefire recognized by the Syrian people and the country's legal government. Speaking with correspondents after a meeting with Adel Abdolmahdi, the former Iraqi oil minister, Velayati reiterated Iran's official position that resolving the crisis in Syria had to include the preservation of Syria's territorial integrity and end the intervention of countries operating in Syria without authorization from the Syrian government. Regarding Iran-Iraq relations, he said Iran would support the Iraqi government's struggle against terrorism. He said an independent, strong Iraq, and a strong Iran were two links in the "chain of resistance" against foreigners, that is, Zionists and regional reactionaries (Tasnim, February 7, 2017).



Ali-Akbar Velayati (right) and Adel Abdolmahdi (ISNA, February 7, 2017).

■ Mohsen Rezaei, secretary of the Iranian Expediency Council and former Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) commander, claimed the IRGC commanders who served as military advisors on the Mediterranean coast [i.e., Syria] kept Iranian's enemies away from its borders. He said the Iranian forces had demonstrated their capabilities in open clashes with the Zionists and Turkey, which had received technology from the United States. He denied claims that Iran supplied weapons to Yemen, saying that in the past Yemen had received large quantities of missiles from Russia (Fars and Alef, February 2, 2017).

Iranian Intervention in Syria and Lebanon

- Javan Sanjevani, an IRGC fighter, was killed when a land mine exploded near the T4 Syrian military air base in the Homs Governate in Syria.



Javan Sanjevani, IRGC fighter killed in Syria (qasemsoleimani.ir, February 3, 2017).

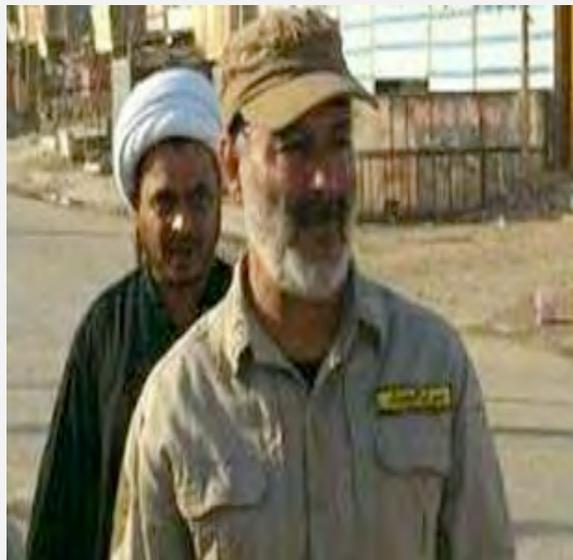
- Iran and Russia continue consultations on developments in Syria. On February 5, 2017, Alexander Lavrentiev, special Russian envoy for Syrian affairs, arrived in Tehran. He met with Ali Shamkhani, the secretary of the Supreme Council for National Security, to discuss developments in Syria in the wake of the talks in Astana. Shamkhani said Iran was committed to a political resolution for the Syrian crisis, and believed a military solution was necessary only for groups unwilling to lay down their arms. He said as long as ISIS, the al-Nusra Front and affiliated groups operated in Syria and were supported by regional countries, no political resolution could be achieved in Syria or the region. He described the Astana talks as a successful approach which could be used as model for ending regional crises (Fars, February 6, 2017). On February 8, 2017, Abbas Araghchi, deputy Iranian foreign minister, met in Moscow with his Russian counterpart to discuss the situation in Syria and the nuclear agreement (Fars, February 5, 2017).

- Ali Shamkhani, the secretary of the Supreme Council for National Security, expressed objections to the idea of establishing safe zones in Syria. Meeting with French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault, who visited Tehran at the end of January, Shamkhani said solutions such as establishing safe or security zones in Syria would pave the way for Syria's disintegration, strengthen terrorism and continue the regional crisis (Fars, January 31, 2017).

■ Hojjat-ul-Islam Shahidi Mahallati, head of the Iranian Shaheed Foundation, claimed that more than 1,000 families of martyrs killed in Syria ("the defenders of the shrines") were receiving support from the foundation (Tasnim, February 7, 2017). In November 2016 he told a meeting of Basij members that more than a thousand fighters from Iran had been killed in Syria, probably referring to the number of IRGC fighters deployed from Iran to Syria, including Iranian citizens, Afghans and Pakistanis.

Iranian Intervention in Iraq

■ Kheirollah Ahmadi, senior IRGC advisor from Kermanshah, was killed while fighting ISIS in Mosul.



Kheirollah Ahmadi, IRGC advisor killed in Mosul, Iraq (qasemsoleimani.ir, February 4, 2017)

■ Iraj Masjedi, senior advisor to the commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, praised Iran's military involvement in Syria and Iraq, saying the victory over ISIS in Mosul would give Iran 250 kilometers (about 155 miles) of security. At a memorial service for fallen IRGC fighters from the city of Roudehen in Tehran Province, he said IRGC fighters in Syria and Iraq did not only defend Shi'ite shrines, but also Iran's geopolitical position and security (Tasnim, January 31, 2017). According to recent reports in the Iranian media, in the near future Masjedi is expected to be appointed Iranian ambassador to Baghdad.



Iraj Masjedi (Tasnim News, January 31, 2017).

■ Ali-Akbar Velayati, advisor to the Iranian supreme leader for international affairs, said Iran's presence in Iraq was based on a legal, constitutional request from Iraq. Meeting with Ján Kubiš, special representative and head of the United Nations assistance mission in Iraq, Velayati said the UN had to help put an end to the involvement of foreign countries in Iraq's internal affairs, and claimed Iran played a positive role in bringing regional peace, stability and development, including in Iraq and Syria (Tasnim, February 5, 2017).

Iranian Intervention in the Palestinian Arena

■ Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri claimed contacts had recently been held between Hamas and Iran to strengthen the bilateral ties. He said he hoped the contacts would have a positive outcome (al-Alam, January 30, 2017). The Syria civil war and Hamas' support for the rebels in Syria, along with the Saudi Arabian attack in Yemen, led to a deep rift between Iran and Hamas, although Iran's connections with Hamas' military-terrorist wing have continued despite political tensions.

■ On January 28, 2017, the Iran Tasnim News agency issued a video allegedly documenting tunnels dug from the Gaza Strip to an Israeli military base. The video shows a Tasnim correspondent interviewing "Mujahideen Battalions" operatives in Arabic. One of them expressed his esteem and thanks to the "Iranian people and regime" for their support of "the Palestinian people and the Palestinian resistance."



Tasnim News video

■ Senior Hamas official Ismail Radwan, in an interview with Tasnim News in the Gaza Strip, spoke about developments in Gaza and the Palestinian Authority, clashes between the Palestinians and Israel, and relations between Hamas and Iran. He claimed Hamas' relations with Iran and Hezbollah had never been broken off, despite political differences and views regarding regional developments. He said Hamas was interested in conducting good, continuing relations with all the resistance groups and with anyone who supported the Palestinian people (Tasnim, February 7, 2017).



Ismail Radwan interviewed by a Tasnim correspondent (Tasnim, February 7, 2017).