



The Meir Amit Intelligence  
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Spotlight on Iran

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Editor: Raz Zimmt



**Highlights of the week**

- ✓ According to Iranian media, Hariri's visit to Tehran will strengthen Tehran-Damascus-Beirut "axis of resistance"
- ✓ Iran calls documents exposed on Wikileaks website "an American fabrication" that is part of a "psychological warfare" campaign against Iran
- ✓ Government critics once again criticize government's foreign policy following severing of ties between Iran and Gambia
- ✓ City of Tehran crippled by severe air pollution
- ✓ Pictures of the week: attempt on the lives of two nuclear scientists from Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran (November 29): one scientist killed, the other injured

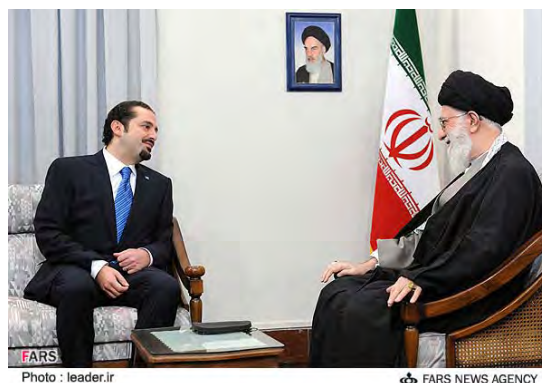
**According to Iranian media, Hariri's visit to Tehran will strengthen  
Tehran-Damascus-Beirut "axis of resistance"**

This week, Iranian media has devoted considerable attention to Lebanese PM Saad al-Hariri's visit to Tehran, citing it as an example of rapprochement between Iran and Lebanon on the backdrop of the coming release of the Rafik al-Hariri assassination report.

The government daily Iran defined Hariri's visit as Beirut's answer to Tehran's "peaceful diplomacy", reflecting the defeat of the American and Israeli policy aimed at intensifying tensions inside Lebanon. According to the daily, the visit reflects not only Iran's unique position in the region but also its positive role in promoting national unity in Lebanon (Iran, November 28).

The conservative daily Qods argued that Hariri's visit would play an effective role in clearing the political atmosphere in Lebanon on the backdrop of the coming release of the international tribunal report on his father's murder, and strengthen the ties between Iran and Lebanon. A commentary article published by the daily says that ever since Rafik al-Hariri's assassination, the U.S. and Israel have been exerting significant efforts in an attempt to crush the "axis of resistance". President Ahmadinejad's visit to Lebanon this past October has, according to the daily, changed the way various political factions in Lebanon view Hezbollah and Iranian-Lebanese relations. Following up on that visit, Hariri's own visit to Tehran may mark the beginning of a new chapter in the cooperation between the two countries and strengthen the Tehran-Damascus-Beirut axis in a way that will have a positive impact on Lebanon's stability (Qods, November 28).

The daily Tehran Emrouz also claimed that Hariri's visit to Iran indicated a major strategic change in Iranian-Lebanese relations. The U.S., Israel, and Saudi Arabia are trying to take advantage of the coming report on Hariri's murder to undermine Hezbollah's position and dissolve the Tehran-Damascus-Beirut axis. Iran has an important part in dealing with the elements that would like to destabilize the internal situation in Lebanon. The daily noted that, in addition to the coming publication of the report, Hariri's visit to Tehran was motivated by other developments: Israel's decision to unilaterally withdraw from the Ghajar region, which, according to the daily, was aimed to facilitate the completion of the UN takeover of the sovereign territory of south Lebanon, and the deteriorating health of Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah, which compromised the Saudi position in Lebanon. In light of the developments, Hariri was forced to seek Iran's help; his visit may strengthen the Tehran-Damascus-Beirut axis and tilt the regional political situation in favor of Middle Eastern nations, particularly the Lebanese people (Tehran Emrouz, November 28).



A more reserved approach to the visit was expressed by the conservative daily Jomhuri-ye Eslami. An editorial published by the daily earlier this week said that Hariri's visit could be considered a positive step towards the start of a new era in Iranian-Lebanese relations. One cannot ignore, however, the ongoing attempts by the Zionists and the West to hit the Islamic resistance movement in Lebanon and restore Western hegemony to that country to ensure the security of the "Zionist regime". The daily argued that the alliance between Hariri and the radical Christian bloc, whose relations with the West and Israel are beyond question, was a cause for concern, and that one should not expect that the Lebanese PM would change his attitude towards the Islamic resistance movement following his visit to Lebanon. The Iranian people expect Hariri to at least not oppose the Islamic resistance movement (Jomhuri-ye Eslami, November 27).

### **Iran calls documents exposed on Wikileaks website "an American fabrication" that is part of a "psychological warfare" campaign against Iran**

Following the publication of the documents on Wikileaks, Iran has claimed this week that the reliability of the leaked documents must be questioned. President Ahmadinejad commented on the documents' exposure by saying that it was a "diabolical" and deliberate publication by the U.S. as part of its psychological warfare campaign against Iran. He noted that the documents on requests made by Iran's Arab neighbors of the U.S. to attack his country were not true, and that they would not hurt the friendly relations between the countries (various news agencies, November 29).

Iranian media also seriously questioned the reliability of the documents. A commentary article released by Mehr News Agency raised three possibilities about the identity of those responsible for the documents' exposure. One possibility is that the documents are, indeed, authentic, and that Arab countries in the region had actually asked the U.S. to attack Iran. The news agency claimed that the likelihood of such a scenario was low since Arab countries were well aware that the damage they would suffer as a result of a U.S. attack on Iran was greater than any possible benefit. Iran had already made it clear that in the event of such an attack it would take action against U.S. targets around the world, mainly in Persian Gulf states. Therefore, not only would Arab countries gain nothing from a U.S. attack on Iran—such an attack would be detrimental to their own interests.

A second possibility is that the U.S. is responsible for the distribution of the documents in order to compromise the friendly relations between Iran and its Arab neighbors. History has

shown, the article says, that if the U.S. was not behind the documents' exposure, it would have already found a way to get rid of the manager of Wikileaks. A third possibility is that a third country, such as Russia or China, has distributed the documents in order to compromise U.S. interests (Mehr, November 29).

The conservative daily Keyhan also ruled out the possibility that the documents were authentic, claiming that they were not secret and even forged. If the White House had information on long-range missiles being transported from North Korea to Iran, Keyhan argued, it would have promptly transferred that information to the UN Security Council to persuade it to isolate and impose sanctions on Iran, having so far failed in its efforts to achieve a consensus against Iran in the Security Council. According to the daily, the documents are meant to be used in the psychological warfare waged by the U.S. against Iran. The Wikileaks website is part of the "soft war" waged by the U.S. against Iran, and would have had no significance if it hadn't been for the extensive coverage on Western media (Keyhan, November 30).

In general, Iranian press has almost completely ignored the contents of the documents directly pertaining to Iran, preferring instead to focus on other aspects of the leak. The government daily Iran claimed that the documents proved that the mission of American diplomats stationed worldwide had changed from gathering information and writing political reports to espionage and gathering personal information on various political figures. The transformation of U.S. embassies into espionage centers, according to the daily, will likely have a detrimental effect on the relations between Washington and other world capitals, and even America's allies will now exercise more caution in their contacts with it (Iran, November 30).

The reformist daily Mardom Salari has also preferred to almost completely ignore the contents of the reports and focus on the so-called predicament of Western press. An editorial published by the daily says that the media appear to have forgotten that their main task is to provide reliable, complete information to the public, and not to betray society by serving the economic interests of large companies and lobby groups. The daily claimed that Western press had once been independent and considered its main role to be the exposure of government corruption. Nowadays, however, the lives of some investigative reporters are at risk while others live in fear, which is why most reporters take no serious action to expose government corruption and prevent government crime (Mardom Salari, November 30).

### **Government critics once again criticize government's foreign policy following severing of ties between Iran and Gambia**

The government of Gambia's decision to sever its diplomatic, political, and economic ties with Iran has drawn many reactions from top Iranian officials this week. Last week, the West African country of Gambia announced that all Iranian representatives had 48 hours to leave its territory. The decision probably had to do with the shipment of Iranian weapons seized in Nigeria earlier this month.

Mohammad Karami-Rad, member of the Majles Foreign Policy and National Security Committee, said earlier this week that Gambia was a poor country with few natural resources, and that it would regret having severed its ties with Iran. In an interview to ISNA News Agency, the Majles member said that the reason for the change of policy by the president of Gambia, who had only recently visited Tehran and expressed his desire for closer relations with Iran, was in "the behavioral and moral characteristics of his personality" (ISNA, November 27). Earlier, Alaeddin Boroujerdi, chairman of the Majles Foreign Policy and National Security Committee, said that Gambia's decision was motivated by the heavy pressure exerted on it by the U.S.

Meanwhile, government critics took advantage of Gambia's decision to once again slam the policy of Ahmadinejad's government. In an interview given by Javid Ghorban-Oghli, Iran's former ambassador to Algeria and South Africa, to Kalemeh, a website affiliated with the reformist opposition, the former Iranian diplomat criticized the current government's foreign policy. Ghorban-Oghli, who served as a diplomat during Mohammad Khatami's presidential term, ascribed the severing of ties with Gambia to the weakness of Iranian diplomacy, claiming that the weakness, which had only increased in recent months, could be seen in numerous developments, including Iran's failure to win a seat on the UN Women's Rights Commission; the decision of the UN Education, Science, and Culture Organization (UNESCO) not to take part in the International Philosophy Day conference held last week in Tehran; and the crisis with the government of Nigeria over the weapons shipment from Iran (Kalemeh, November 27).



**President Ahmadinejad on a visit to Gambia, November 2009**

Qodratollah Alikhani, member of the Majles Foreign Policy and National Security Committee, also criticized the current government's foreign policy over the severing of ties with Gambia. The reformist Majles member claimed that the government of Gambia's decision was an insult to the Iranian nation, and that Iran was following an indiscriminate policy towards some of the world's countries. According to Alikhani, Iran places too much importance on countries that lack a firm diplomatic foundation. It also invests a great deal of money and builds factories in various countries, such as Zimbabwe, while its own younger generation faces severe unemployment problems (ILNA, November 27).

On the other hand, Revolutionary Guards weekly *Sobh-e Sadeh* claimed in its latest issue that the severing of ties between Iran and Gambia reflected the West's failure in contending with Iran. Led by the U.S., Western countries have been unable to secure the support of large, influential countries for a campaign against Iran and are now forced to turn to "small, microscopic" countries such as Gambia and pressure them to sever ties with Iran. On the eve of the resumption of nuclear talks with Iran, the West is attempting to portray the severing of ties between Iran and Gambia as a reflection of Tehran's isolation, when in fact it is meaningless since Gambia is a small country that has no influence whatsoever (*Sobh-e Sadeh*, November 29).

### **City of Tehran crippled by severe air pollution**

This week, Iranian media has provided extensive coverage of the severe air pollution in Tehran, which prompted the government to decide to close down its Tehran offices and the city's education institutions both last week and this week.

Tehran Emrouz, a daily published on behalf of the Tehran municipality, gave a detailed report on the air pollution crisis earlier this week. When air pollution reached critical, dangerous levels, the governor of Tehran established an emergency committee to discuss various ways to promptly deal with the crisis, such as reducing work hours in government ministries and imposing restrictions on the use of private vehicles. The daily cited figures released by the Ministry of Health, according to which 3500-4000 citizens of Tehran had died last year as a result of air pollution-related diseases (Tehran Emrouz, November 28).

The reformist daily *Mardom Salari* criticized the authorities' inability to deal with the years-long air pollution in Tehran, claiming that a long-term, well-planned strategy was necessary to resolve the escalating crisis. The thousands of citizens who died from air pollution-related diseases in the past several years are proof that the various programs to reduce air pollution have failed, including the expansion of Tehran's public transportation system and the relocation of government ministries from the capital. The further development of such



projects as electronic government, electronic trade, and electronic banking will allow Tehran residents to perform various tasks from their homes and will reduce the use of private vehicles that aggravate the pollution. The daily stressed that, in order to implement those projects, it is necessary to increase the internet connection speed in government ministries and various institutions to allow Tehran residents to access those services from home (Mardom Salari, November 28).

The daily Afarinesh also criticized the solutions currently employed by the authorities to deal with the air pollution. According to the daily, closing down schools and government ministries will not solve the problem, since Tehran residents use the days off to continue driving across town in their private vehicles for shopping or to visit relatives. Those in charge must take more reasonable and effective means, such as improving the quality of vehicles and the industry (Afarinesh, November 28).

Majles member Mohammad Hassan Dogani also called to deal with the crisis at its root cause. In an interview to Aftab News Agency, Dogani listed various possible ways to mitigate the worsening air pollution, such as reducing immigration into Tehran by supporting the capital's outlying towns and villages and improving the city's public transportation (Aftab, November 28).



Air pollution is currently one of Iran's most severe environmental problems, mainly in the capital city of Tehran. Over 80 percent of pollutants originate in private vehicles. The capital's geographic position makes the air pollution even worse: the city is blocked to the north by the Alborz Mountains, which trap the air inside the city particularly when winds are not strong enough. The damage caused to Tehran's "green lungs", destroyed in recent years as a result of municipal development projects, has resulted in increased levels of air pollution and made Tehran one of the world's most polluted cities. In recent years, the city has been shut down on several occasions due to extreme pollution. The Iranian authorities attempt to combat the air pollution by restricting the use of private vehicles, expanding the subway network, and reducing the use of low-quality fuel; however, those attempts have had no effect so far.

**Pictures of the week: attempt on the lives of two nuclear scientists from Shahid Beheshti University in Tehran (November 29): one scientist killed, the other injured**

