



Spotlight on Iran

August 27 - September 10, 2017

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Overview

- ▶ Senior Iranian officials praised the lifting of the siege from the city of Deir Ezzor in eastern Syria, defining it as “important and strategic.” Against the backdrop of regime gains in the battlefield and the negotiations process to end the war in Syria, the representative of the Supreme Leader to the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) detailed Iran’s four “red lines” in Syria: the protection of holy Shi’ite sites, preserving Syria as part of the “resistance front,” maintaining the independence and territorial unity of Syria, and securing Bashar al-Assad’s position as the President of Syria.
- ▶ Meanwhile, Iran is continuing to pursue its diplomatic work vis-à-vis Syria and Russia surrounding the negotiations process. The Iranian deputy foreign minister for Arab and African visited Syria in late August and conducted several meetings with senior Syrian regime officials, chief among them President Assad. In early September, the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council met with the special envoy on Syria of the Russian president.
- ▶ The incoming Iranian Minister of Defense, Amir Hatami, declared upon assuming his position that Iran will continue to provide assistance to the “resistance front,” adding that Iran is capable of expanding the “advisory assistance” it has provided to its proxies. The statement by Hatami, who is the first Iranian Defense Minister since 1989 who comes from the ranks of the regular Armed Forces and not the IRGC, is meant to emphasize Iran’s unwavering commitment to its regional allies throughout the term of the second Rouhani government.
- ▶ A high-ranking Iranian delegation headed by the Chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council, Mahmoud Shahroudi, conducted a visit to Iraq. The delegation met with the Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, and paid a visit to the headquarters of the pro-Iranian Shi’ite militia “al-Nujaba” in Salah al-Din province. The visit, during which the heads of the delegation emphasized Iran’s continued

support to Iraq in its fight against terrorism, occurred against the backdrop of the liberation of the city of Tel Afar from ISIS and the reports about improvements in Iraqi-Saudi relations.

► Senior Iranian officials continue to issue warning about the repercussions of the independence referendum of the Kurdish region in northern Iraq. The spokesperson of the Iranian Foreign Ministry labeled the decision of Kirkuk province in northern Iraq to participate in the referendum as dangerous and provocative, while the Secretary of the Expediency Discernment Council, Mohsen Rezaei, warned about the dangerous ramifications of the referendum for the region.

► In a special statement marking the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, once again defined the protection of Palestine as the most important task of the Muslim world. He stated that the internal wars in the Muslim world have resulted in a dereliction of the central duty of the countries of Islam to protect Palestine and save it from the “Zionists.”

General Information

► Senior Iranian officials welcomed the lifting of the siege from the city of Deir Ezzor in eastern Syria. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohammad Javad Zarif, described the breaking of the siege as an “important victory” in the struggle against terrorism. The Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, Ali Shamkhani, sent a congratulatory message to the Head of the Syrian National Security Bureau, Ali Mamlouk, which stated that the victories against terrorism in Syria and Iraq and the liberation of important and strategic regions foretell a bright, safe and stable future for the region. He mentioned that the close cooperation between Iran, Syria, Iraq, Russia and Hezbollah resulted in significant achievements in the struggle against terrorism and foiling of foreign plots against the countries of the region, adding that Iran will continue to provide support for Syria in its post-war reconstruction (Fars, September 5).

► Hojjat-ul-Islam Ali Sa’idi, the Representative of the Supreme Leader to the IRGC, stated that the protection of holy sites for the Shi’ite community, preserving Syria as part of the “resistance front,” maintaining the independence and territorial unity of Syria, and securing Bashar al-Assad in his position are Iran’s four “red lines” in Syria. Sa’idi also mentioned that Palestine, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon are important to Iran, since Iran has a

responsibility for the world order and preparing the ground for the return of the “Hidden Imam” (Entekhab, August 30).



**Ali Sa'idi, the Representative of the Supreme Leader to the IRGC
(Entekhab, August 30 2017).**

► The incoming Iranian Minister of Defense, Amir Hatami, stated that Iran will continue to provide assistance to the “resistance front.” Hatami claimed that Iran’s enemies are concerned by Iran becoming a model to be emulated by the resistance and its support for resistance groups in the region. He added that Iran’s support for the “resistance front” has been limited in the past to “advisory assistance,” and it will persist in this manner, but Iran can expand this assistance if it so desires (Fars, August 31).

Iranian Involvement in Syria and Lebanon

► The Deputy Foreign Minister of Arab and African Affairs, Hossein Jaber Ansari, visited Syria in late August and conducted meetings with senior Syrian regime officials, chief among them President Assad and Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem. Ansari discussed the developments in Syria and the region and the negotiations in Astana with the senior Syrian officials. President Assad thanked Ansari for Iran’s persistent support for Syria in “its struggle against terrorism” and emphasized the need to maintain cooperation between the two countries (Fars, August 30).



The meeting between President Assad and the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Ansari in Damascus (Fars, August 30 2017).

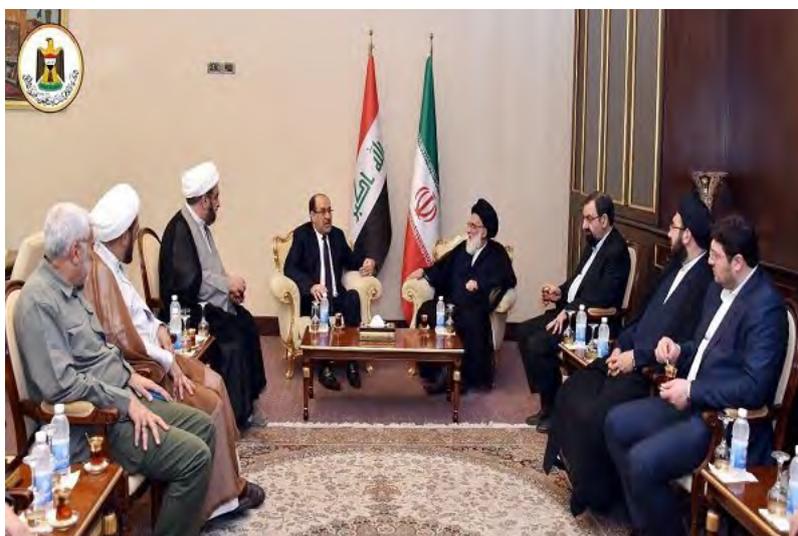
- ▶ On September 5, Ali Shamkhani, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, met in Tehran with Alexander Lavrentiev, the Special Envoy on Syria of the Russian president. The two discussed the military developments and negotiations in Syria. In the meeting, Shamkhani referred to the achievements of the Syrian regime, among them the “liberation of Deir Ezzor” from ISIS, adding that the strategic cooperation between Iran, Syria, Russia and the “resistance front” is yielding results in the political and military arenas (Mehr, September 5).



The Shamkhani- Lavrentiev meeting (Mehr, September 5 2017).

Iranian Involvement in Iraq

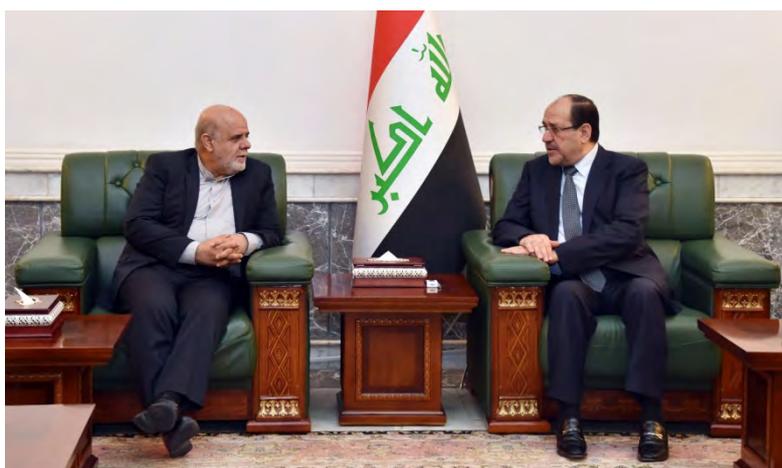
► A high-ranking Iranian delegation headed by the Chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council, Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, and the Secretary of the Council, Mohsen Rezaei, arrived in Baghdad on August 31. The delegation met with senior Iraqi officials, headed by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, and with senior Shi'ite clerics. In the meeting with the Iraqi Prime Minister, Shahroudi congratulated al-Abadi for the liberation of Mosul and Tel Afar from ISIS, and emphasized Iran's complete support to the Iraqi government in its struggle to eradicate terrorism, fully liberate the territories occupied by ISIS, and to achieve stability and development in Iraq. Al-Abadi expressed before Shahroudi his appreciation for Tehran's support for Baghdad in its fight against terrorism (Fars, September 4).



The meeting between members of the Expediency Discernment Council and Nouri al-Maliki (Mehr, August 31 2017).

► In a meeting with the Vice President and former Prime Minister of Iraq, Nouri al-Maliki, Shahroudi stated that the American claim about fighting ISIS is a lie and that the organization is used by the United States to divide the Muslim world. He stated that Muslim government must fight against the radical Islamic groups to forestall the American schemes in the region. al-Maliki thanked the members of the delegation for the political and financial support Iran has been providing to Iraq, and its assistance to Iraq's fight against terrorism. Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the Deputy Commander of the "Popular Mobilization Committee", the umbrella organization of the Shi'ite Iraqi militias, also participated in the meeting of the Iranian delegation and al-Maliki (Tasnim, August 31).

- ▶ During his visit to Iraq, Shahroudi also toured the headquarters of the pro-Iranian Shi'ite Iraqi militia "al-Nujaba" in Salah al-Din province. Shahroudi expressed his appreciation to the cadres of the militia, which is also taking part in the war in Syria, and said that Iran will support all resistance groups (Tasnim, September 5).
- ▶ On August 28, the Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad, Iraj Masjedi, met with the Iraqi Vice President and former Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, and discussed with him the bilateral relationship between the countries and developments in Iraq, Masjedi emphasized that Iran supports a unified Iraq and is interested in establishing the best possible relations with Iraq in different spheres (ISNA, August 28).



The Masjedi-Maliki meeting (ISNA, August 28 2017).

- ▶ The Spokesperson of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bahram Qasemi, stated that the decision of Kirkuk province in northern Iraq to participate in the referendum on independence for the Kurdish region is dangerous, provocative and will negatively affect Iraq's ability to stabilize the gains it made in its victories against terrorism. He stated that Iran continues to warn against holding the referendum, which represents a grave violation of Iraq's national sovereignty and territorial unity, and emphasizes the need to solve internal disagreement in Iraq by negotiations and within the framework of the Iraqi constitution. He added that any step that may create additional crises in the region and in border regions with Iraq's neighbors is unacceptable (Tasnim, August 30).
- ▶ The Secretary of the Expediency Discernment Council, Mohsen Rezaei, also warned against holding of the referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan and its dangerous ramifications for the region, according to him. In an interview to the Lebanese TV network "al-Mayadeen", Rezaei stated that the referendum will lead to the partition of Iraq, and expressed hope that

the referendum will not be held as scheduled (Mehr, September 3). The statements by Qasemi and Rezaei are among a series of warnings issued by senior Iranian officials in recent weeks against the referendum planned by the Kurdish Regional Government in northern Iraq, set to be held later in September.

Iranian Involvement in the Palestinian Arena

► In a statement issued on the occasion of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca and Eid al-Adha, the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, defined the defense of Palestine as the most important task of the Muslim world. Khamenei stated that the Muslim world is busy with internal wars in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya and Bahrain and the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan, Pakistan and other places, and is shirking its responsibility to come to the rescue of Palestine. The statement said that the leaders of the Muslim world and the political, cultural and religion elites bear many responsibilities, including forging of unity, providing assistance in the struggle against the enemy, supporting oppressed Muslim minorities around the world, and most important of all: defending Palestine and providing support and unconditional cooperation to the people struggling to reclaim their land for nearly 70 years (Fars, August 31).