



Spotlight on Iran

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Overview

- ▶ Turkish-Iranian coordination is increasingly invigorated following the independence referendum in the Kurdish region in northern Iraq. Turkish President Erdoğan visited Tehran in early October and met with the Supreme Leader Khamenei and President Rouhani. The leaders of the two countries emphasized their adamant opposition to Kurdistan's independence and agreed to continue coordinating their efforts in view of the developments in the Kurdish region. Erdoğan's stopover in Tehran was preceded by a visit of the Turkish Chief of the General Staff, Hulusi Akar, to the Iranian capital. His meetings with the Iranian minister of defense and chief of staff focused on developments in the Kurdish region and Syria and the expansion of security cooperation between the two countries. Meanwhile, Iranian officials continue issuing warnings about Israel's alleged intension to entrench its hold over northern Iraq by supporting Kurdish independence.
- ▶ Senior Iranian officials rebuked the reports about the intension of the U.S. administration to designate the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) as a foreign terrorist organization. The Commander of the IRGC, Mohammad Ali Jafari, declared that if the United State designates the IRGC as a terrorist organization, the IRGC will regard the U.S. armed forces around the world, and in particular the Middle East, as they regard ISIS. He warned the U.S. administration that if it imposes new sanctions against Iran, it will have to move its military bases to a region beyond the range of Iranian missiles.
- ▶ Iran continues to be involved in the campaign against the last pockets of ISIS resistance in Iraq. An IRGC fighter was killed in the battle to capture an ISIS redoubt in al-Hawija, south of Mosul. The Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, Iraj Masjedi, visited the town of Balad south of Tikrit and met with members of the Shi'ite Harakat al-Nujaba militia, which operates under IRGC supervision in Iraq and Syria.
- ▶ Bolstering of the economic cooperation between Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon continues apace: The Senior Military Adviser of the Iranian Supreme Leader, Yahya Rahim Safavi, called

for boosting economic ties between the four countries by laying railroad tracks from Iran through Iraq and Syria to the Mediterranean and encouraging religious tourism, among other measures. Safavi's statement provides further evidence to Iran's desire to expand its economic clout in Syria and Iraq following the conclusion of the campaign against ISIS. Another manifestation of Iran's intension was a statement by Alaeddin Boroujerdi, the Chairman of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, during his visit in Damascus in early October. In a meeting with President Assad, Boroujerdi asserted that Iran is willing to utilize its significant capabilities in the economic and industrial spheres to help rebuild Syria following the civil war.

General Information

► On October 4, the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, arrived for an official visit to Tehran. During the one-day visit, Erdoğan met with the Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei and President Rouhani. At a joint press conference with Erdoğan, Rouhani stated that in the meeting, the two discussed in detail developments in the region and in particular in Syria and the Kurdish region in northern Iraq. Rouhani maintained that the two countries will not accept any attempt to change the geographic borders of the region and support maintaining Iraq's and Syria's territorial integrity. Rouhani maintained that Iraqi Kurdistan is one of the Iran's good neighbors and that Iran is not interested in applying pressure on the residents of the Kurdish region. However, there must be atonement for the wrong decisions made by some leaders of the Kurdish Regional Government, he said (Fars, October 4).



**The joint Rouhani- Erdoğan press conference
(Tasnim, October 4, 2017)**

- ▶ The Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei stated in his meeting with Erdoğan that the United States and foreign powers strive to establish a “new Israel” in the region through the Kurdish referendum, which he labeled as a “betrayal and a threat to the future of the region.” He asserted that Iran and Turkey must do everything in their power to resist this (Fars, October 4).
- ▶ Erdoğan’s stopover was preceded by a visit to Tehran in early October of the Turkish Chief of the General Staff, Hulusi Akar. During the visit, Akar met with senior Iranian officials, chief among them President Hassan Rouhani, Minister of Defense Amir Hatami, the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani, and the Iranian Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, Mohammad Hossein Baqeri. In the meeting between the chiefs of staff, the two discussed developments in Syria, the repercussions of the independence referendum in the Kurdish region in northern Iraq and security cooperation between the two countries. In their meeting, the two emphasized that the Iraqi constitution and Iraq’s territorial integrity need to serve as the foundation for negotiations between the central government in Baghdad and the Kurdish Regional Government (ISNA, October 2). The Minister of Defense Hatami reiterated Iran’s support for the territorial integrity of Syria and Iraq in his meeting with Akar, and averred that Iran and Turkey will not allow the realization of the “new scheme of the Zionist regime in the region” (Fars, October 3). The visit of the Turkish Chief of Staff in Tehran was held six weeks after the trip of the Iranian chief of staff to Ankara, the first visit of its kind since the Islamic Revolution.



The Turkish and Iranian chiefs of staff (Tasnim, October 2, 2017)

- ▶ The Commander of the IRGC, Mohammad Ali Jafari, stated that Iran is unwilling to deliberate with the United States over regional issues and intends to solve those issues

outside the confines of the negotiating table. In his remarks, made during a meeting of the Strategic Council of the IRGC focused on the policies of the American administration vis-à-vis Iran, Jafari proclaimed that if the United States decides to impose new sanctions against Iran, it will have to move its military bases to a region beyond the 2,000 km (1,240 mile) range of Iran's missiles. He added that if the U.S. designates the IRGC as a terrorist organization, the IRGC will regard the American armed forces around the world, and in particular in the Middle East, as they regard ISIS (Mehr, October 8).

► The Senior Military Adviser of the Iranian Supreme Leader, Yahya Rahim Safavi, addressed regional developments in a lecture he gave to PhD students in one of Iran's universities. He criticized the decision of the Kurdish Regional Government to hold a referendum on the independence of the region and added that Iran has supported the Kurds in Iraq for fifty years, both the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) under the leadership of Barzani and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) led by Talabani. Safavi alleged that Israel, the United States and some among the Arab states are behind the referendum, aiming to alter the borders of the region, create tensions and allow permanent Zionist-American presence in the region. He maintained that the "Zionists" are visiting northern Iraq, sometimes utilizing European passports, and investing in Kurdish banks. In addition, he claimed, Israel is providing the Kurds with military training and flights are taking place between Israel and Iraqi Kurdistan. He estimated, however, that an independent Kurdish state will not be established in the near future due to the opposition of Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Syria, adding that the referendum was a way for Barzani to obtain additional concessions from the central government in Baghdad.

► Khamenei's adviser addressed the tightening of relations between Turkey, Russia and Iran over the past year, and claimed that the three countries are united in their position concerning the Syrian question. Later in his remarks, Safavi called for boosting economic ties between Iran, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, on top of the ongoing political and security coordination between the countries. He mentioned that the "economic axis" between the four countries can be bolstered by constructing railroad tracks from Iran through Iraq and Syria to the Mediterranean and encouraging religious tourism between the four countries. According to Safavi, the land bridge from Iran to the Mediterranean through Iraq and Syria also serves as a security corridor that provides Iran with strategic depth in dealing with various threats, among them Israel (YJC.IR, October 4).



Yahya Rahim Safavi, the Senior Military Adviser to the Supreme Leader (YJC.IR, October 4, 2017)

Iranian Involvement in Syria

► On October 4, the Chairman of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, Alaeddin Boroujerdi, arrived for a visit in Damascus, heading a delegation of Majlis members. Boroujerdi stated that the purpose of his visit was to pass on the greetings of the Speaker of the Majlis, Ali Larijani, to the incoming Speaker of the Syrian Parliament, Hammouda Youssef al-Sabbagh. In a meeting with the Syrian Foreign Minister, Walid al-Mua'llem, Boroujerdi stressed the importance of relations between the parliaments of Syria and Iran. Boroujerdi added that Iran will continue to support Syria in its struggle against terrorism and the supporters of terrorism until the final victory and restoration of peace and stability in the country (SANA, October 4). In his meeting with President Assad, Boroujerdi asserted that Iran is willing to assist in Syria's post-war reconstruction in utilizing its significant capabilities in the industrial and economic spheres. President Assad told the senior Majlis member that Syria will never forget Iran's support to it throughout the war (Mehr, October 5). During his visit, Boroujerdi also addressed the independence referendum in the Kurdish region in northern Iraq, labeling the decision to hold it "a strategic mistake" (IRNA, October 4).



The meeting between Boroujerdi and the Syrian Foreign Minister (Fars, October 4, 2017)

► Al-Akbar Velayati, the International Affairs Adviser to the Supreme Leader, warned in his meeting with the Syrian Ambassador to Tehran, Adnan Mahmoud, about the growing American presence in east and north-eastern Syria. According to him, the Americans aim is to partition Syria and Iraq and establish “a second Israel” in the region. He expressed his appreciation to Syria under Assad’s leadership, stating that Syria has defended the honor of the resistance in the region and proved that it is possible to withstand international conspiracies (IRNA, October 10).



The meeting between Velayati and the Syrian ambassador to Tehran (IRNA, October 10, 2017)

Iranian Involvement in Iraq

► An IRGC member, Ali Khoushlesan, was killed in the battle led by Iraqi forces to capture the former ISIS bastion of al-Hawija, south of Mosul.



**IRGC fighter Ali Khoushlesan who was killed in Iraq
(Twitter, October 7, 2017)**

- ▶ The Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, Mohammad Baqeri, warned again about the repercussions of the independence referendum in the Kurdish region in northern Iraq. In a ceremony marking the second anniversary of the death of Hossein Hamedani, the senior Iranian military adviser to Syria, who was killed in October 2015 near the city of Aleppo, Baqeri maintained that Kurdistan's independence will change nothing about the situation and status of the Kurds in northern Iraq. According to him, the referendum is a plot hatched by the enemies, "the Zionist regime and the criminal United States" (ISNA, October 5).
- ▶ On Friday, October 6, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohammad Javad Zarif, arrived for a short visit to Sulaymaniyah in Iraqi Kurdistan to attend the funeral of the Kurdish leader and former Iraqi President, Jalal Talabani, who had passed away. A statement issued following the death of the Kurdish leader by the Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bahram Qasemi, claimed that Talabani dedicated his life to the freedom, independence, unity and territorial integrity of his country, and to the establishment of ties of friendship between the Iraqi and Iranian people (ISNA, October 6). During his visit, Zarif stated that Iran will forever be a friend of the Iraqi people, including the Kurds, and that the Kurdish people should not be blamed for the strategic mistakes of some individuals (Tasnim, October 6).



**Zarif (second from the right) in Talabani's funeral
(Fararu, October 6, 2017)**

► On September 30, the Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, Iraj Masjedi, met with fighters in the Shi'ite Harakat al-Nujaba militia, which operates under IRGC supervision in Iraq and Syria. In the meeting, held in the town of Balad south of Tikrit, Masjedi expressed his appreciation for the militia's role and declared that Iran will continue to support the militia as well as all other "resistance groups." The Iranian ambassador also met with Abu Hasan al-Baldawi, the military representative of the al-Nujaba militia in Salah al-Din province and discussed with him the security arrangements for pilgrims, who are expected to arrive in Iraq in early November to mark the "Arba'in", the Shi'ite holy day observed forty days after the Ashura fast, the day of mourning commemorating the death of Imam Hussein bin Ali (Rasa News, October 1).



**The Iranian ambassador to Iraq with al-Nujaba fighters
(Rasa News, October 1, 2017)**

Iranian Involvement in the Palestinian Arena

► The Spokesman of Hamas, Abdel Latif al-Qanua, claimed in an interview to the Iranian Mehr News Agency (October 5) that the relationship between Iran and Hamas is strong and special, and Hamas will not allow Israel or any other actor to intervene in the matter. He stated that Hamas strives to maintain good relations with all countries of the region and the “Israeli regime” cannot decide for the Palestinians with whom to maintain ties and with whom to cut ties. al-Qanua thus responded to the demand of the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, that Hamas dismantle its armed wing and cut ties with Iran as part of the reconciliation process between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas.