



# Spotlight on Iran

April 29 – May 13, 2018

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## Overview

- ▶ Iran is attempting to downplay the involvement of the Qods Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in launching rockets toward IDF outposts in the Golan Heights on the night of May 10. Instead, Iran is presenting the events as a direct confrontation between Israel and Syria. The limited Iranian response and attempt to downplay the IRGC's involvement indicate Iran's desire to avoid an all-out confrontation and the constraints facing Iran in the Syrian arena.
- ▶ Against the backdrop of growing tensions between Iran and Israel, senior Iranian officials continue to threaten Israel: The Minister of Defense, Amir Hatami, warned about a decisive Iranian response against Israel if it continues to act against Iran. In addition, the Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, Mohammad Bagheri, declared that Iran's enemies (meaning, Israel), will face an appropriate response to their aggression at the right moment.
- ▶ Meanwhile, an Iranian military source denied the reports about strikes on Iranian targets as part of a raid that was carried out on April 29 against military bases in the Aleppo and Hama governorates in Syria. Iranian officials did not address the attack in Syria on the night of May 8, also attributed to Israel.
- ▶ As expected, Iran congratulated Hezbollah for its achievement in the parliamentary elections held in Lebanon, presenting it as a victory for the Resistance Front and a defeat for Saudi Arabia and the West. The Senior Adviser to the Supreme Leader, Ali-Akbar Velayati, called the election results "a big victory," which complemented Hezbollah's military victories in the struggle against Israel.
- ▶ Talks between Iran and Kurdish representatives from Syria and Iraq: In early May, the Adviser of the Supreme Leader, Ali-Akbar Velayati, met with a delegation of representatives from Kurdish Syrian tribes that visited Tehran. Concurrently, an Iranian delegation headed by the Iranian minister of industry met with representatives of the Kurdish Regional Government in Erbil. During the meeting in Erbil, the two sides signed an agreement on economic cooperation between Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan.

## General Information

► Iran’s Minister of Defense, Amir Hatami, threatened Israel with a decisive response if it keeps undertaking action against Iran. In response to a press conference held by the Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu (April 30), in which Netanyahu presented intelligence concerning Iran’s military nuclear program, Hatami warned that if “the Zionist regime” and its supporters continue to plot and act recklessly, Iran’s response will be devastating and make them regret their actions. Hatami asserted that “Netanyahu’s propaganda show” is part of Israel’s efforts to cover up its crimes against the Palestinian people (Tasnim, May 1, 2018).



**Iran’s Minister of Defense, Amir Hatami (Tasnim, May 1, 2018)**

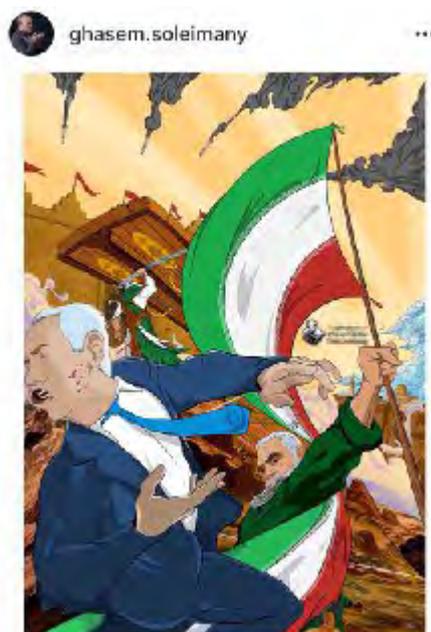
► Mohammad Bagheri, the Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed, joined in the chorus of threats. In a remark alluding to Israel, he declared that if the enemy carries out aggression against Iran’s interests, Iran will respond in kind at the appropriate time. He stated that the lack of a response to several events, which took place in recent days, does not indicate silence or acceptance of the aggression, and that Iran’s enemy will suffer a retaliation at the appropriate time (Tasnim, May 7, 2018).

## Iranian Involvement in Syria and Lebanon

► Iran is trying to downplay the involvement of the Qods Force of the IRGC in the rocket launch on the night of May 10 toward IDF forward operating bases in the Golan Heights, instead presenting the events as a confrontation between Israel and Syria. In response to the rocket barrage, Israeli aircrafts struck Syrian bases, which also served as staging grounds for the IRGC and Shi’ite militias operating under the guidance of the IRGC’s Qods Force. The IDF spokesperson announced that among the targets that were struck were Iranian intelligence

sites operated by the Qods Force; logistical bases of the Qods Force; a military compound and a logistics compound of the Qods Force in al-Kisweh, south of Damascus; an Iranian base north of Damascus; weapon storage facilities of the Qods Force at the Damascus International Airport; weapon systems and intelligence outposts belonging to the Qods Force as well as military positions and weapons systems.

► The spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bahram Qasemi, condemned the ongoing Israeli “military aggression” against Syria and called it a blatant violation of Syria’s sovereignty. His statement did not include any reference to Iranian involvement in the events (Mehr, May 11, 2018).



**The response of Qasem Soleimani’s Instagram page to the events of May 10**

► The Syrian Arab News Agency reported that Israel struck positions of the Syrian Army on the outskirts of Quneitra and that among the sites targeted were positions of Iranian militias and Hezbollah in the Syrian Golan. On May 9, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that the May 8 strike attributed to Israel, resulted in the death of at least 15 people, eight among them Iranian. The Observatory reported that the target of the strike were military facilities used by Iran in the area of al-Kisweh. This strike garnered no official Iranian response.

► An Iranian military source denied to the Mehr News Agency (April 30) the reports about strikes on Iranian targets as part of an attack carried out on the night of April 29 against a number of military bases in the governorates of Aleppo and Hama. Various sources reported

that the targets of the strikes were a military airport near Aleppo, and a military base in Hama, which is used by Syrian forces along with the IRGC and foreign Shi'ite militias operating under Iranian patronage. In addition, it was reported that another target of the strike, attributed to Israel, was a facility with underground networks to manufacture and store missiles. Syrian sources, which were initially cited in a number of Iranian news agencies, reported that 18 Iranians were killed, but these reports were then quickly denied by Iranian media (Tasnim, April 30, 2018).

- ▶ At the end of April, the Chairman of the Majlis Foreign Affairs and National Security Committee, Alaeddin Boroujerdi, paid a visit to Damascus. On April 30, Boroujerdi met with President Assad and discussed developments in Syria with him. Three Majlis members accompanied Boroujerdi on his visit, including Karen Khanlarian, the representative of the Armenian community at the Majlis and Siamak Moreh Sedgh, the representative of the Jewish community in the Iranian parliament (IRNA, April 30, 2018).
- ▶ During a press conference in Damascus, Boroujerdi condemned the recent airstrikes carried out by the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Israel in Syria, stating that they are a violation of international law (Asr-e Iran, May 2, 2018).



**The meeting between Boroujerdi and President Assad  
(al-Alam, April 30, 2018)**

- ▶ In early May, Ali-Akbar Velayati, the Foreign Affairs Adviser to the Iranian Supreme Leader, met with a delegation of representatives of Kurdish tribes headed by Khalid Atiyah, which was visiting Iran. During the meeting, Velayati stated that the Kurdish tribes in Syria are struggling against the United States and the Zionists and will expel them from the region east of the Euphrates River. He mentioned that the presence of Kurdish leaders from the governorates of al-Hassakeh, ar-Raqqa and Deir Ezzor in Iran is a practical response to the

United States, the Zionists and Saudis who wish to present the Kurds as supporters of those countries (Tasnim, May 1, 2018).

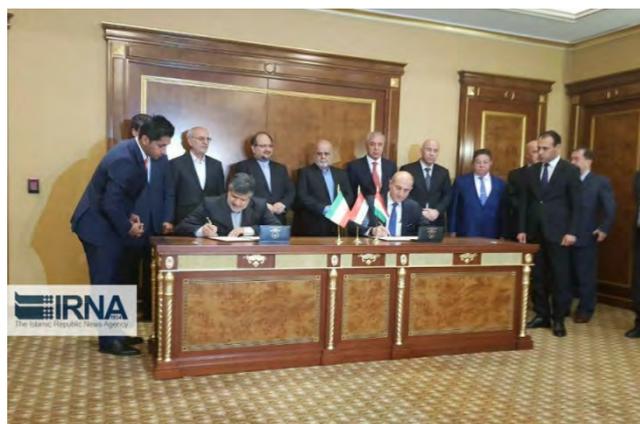


**Velayati's meeting with the Kurdish tribal representatives  
(ISNA, May 1, 2018)**

- ▶ Iran highlighted Hezbollah's gains in the parliamentary elections held in Lebanon last week and presented them as a victory of the Resistance Front and a defeat for Saudi Arabia. Ali-Akbar Velayati, the Senior Adviser to the Supreme Leader on Foreign Affairs, labeled the election results in Lebanon "a great victory" against Israel. In an interview to Iranian television (May 7), Velayati argued that this victory complements the military victories of the Lebanese people and their representatives, Hezbollah and the other resistance forces, in the struggle against Israel and its backers. He added that the elections prove that the Lebanese people support the policies of the Lebanese establishment in various spheres, including the struggle against Israel and the assistance to Syria against terrorism. When referring to Saudi involvement in Lebanon, Velayati asserted that several months prior, the Saudis attempted to foment disorder in Lebanese and internal confrontations by kidnapping the Lebanese Prime Minister, Saad Hariri, to prevent the achievements of the Resistance in the elections. Their plot has been foiled, however, by President Michel Aoun, the leader of Hezbollah Hassan Nasrallah, and the Lebanese people, who proved that they are not affected by threats from the Saudis, Americans and Israelis, Velayati argued.
- ▶ In a commentary published on the conservative Iranian website Farda News (May 7), the author stated that Hezbollah's gains in Lebanon in general and in Beirut in particular, prove that Lebanese public opinions views Iran and Hezbollah positively. This is despite the efforts of opponents of Hezbollah to present Iran's involvement in Lebanon as a threat and to exploit Hezbollah's presence in Syria to incite against the organization.

## Iranian Involvement in Iraq

► In early May, Erbil city in northern Iraq witnessed a conference of representatives of the Iraqi Kurdistan region and Iran. At the helm of the Iranian delegation to the conference was the Iranian Minister of Industry, Mohammad Shariatmadari. During his visit, Shariatmadari met with the Prime Minister of the Kurdish Regional Government, Nechirvan Barzani. The Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, Iraj Masjedi, also took part in the conference. At the end of the event, the Iranian and Kurdish representatives signed an agreement concerning economic cooperation between the two sides. Shariatmadari stated that the agreement serves as a positive foundation for further cooperation between Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan. He added that a joint commission, established with the backing of the central government in Baghdad, the Iranian embassy in Iraq and the Iraqi embassy in Iran, will examine the issue of relations between Tehran and the Kurdish region. The Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) stated that the KRG intends to establish a Free Trade Zone near the border with Iran to expand the economic relationship between Erbil and Tehran (Rudaw, May 2-3, 2018).



**Signing of the agreement concerning economic cooperation between Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan (IRNA, May 3, 2018)**