



# Spotlight on Iran

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Author: Dr. Raz Zimmt



## Overview

- ▶ In response to an attack that took place on September 22 against a military parade in Ahvaz, Khuzestan province in southwestern Iran, on the night of October 1, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) launched six ballistic missiles toward the Albu Kamal region in eastern Syria. The attack also employed strike drones. The Iranian chief of staff declared that the missile strike is the first stage in the revenge operation against the perpetrators of the terrorist attack in Ahvaz, and that Iran's response demonstrates that Iran's national security is a "red line."
- ▶ The missile strike in Syria can be seen as an execution of the threat made by Iranian officials who vowed to avenge the attack in Ahvaz, which killed at least 25 people. This is after Iran's leadership blamed Arab separatists and not ISIS for the attack in the initial days following it. Alongside the desire to avenge the attack, the Iranian response is also intended to send a deterrent message to the United States, Saudi Arabia and Israel, in light of the growing pressure on it by the United States and its regional allies. Iran's leadership aims to express its readiness to respond to any possible infringement on its national security, and even use its advanced ballistic missile capabilities in the event of future conflict.
- ▶ Iran and Russia continue to deliberate regarding Syria: The Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, Ali Shamkhani, met in Tehran with the Secretary of the Russian Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev, and discussed developments in Syria and the security cooperation between the two countries. The foreign ministers of Russia, Turkey and Iran also discussed the situation in Syria on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York.
- ▶ Iran is accelerating its efforts to expand its economic influence in post-war Syria: an Iranian delegation visited Damascus and met with the Syrian prime minister to promote Iranian investments in Syria. 14 large Iranian firms from the construction, energy and communications sectors participated in an international fair for Syria's reconstruction held in Damascus. In addition, the Syrian minister of electricity visited Tehran and signed an

agreement concerning cooperation in the electricity sectors with his Iranian counterpart. The agreement includes the establishment of a power plant by Iran in Lattakia, which would produce 540 megawatts.

► In Iraq, Iran made gains in the competition with the United States surrounding the formation of a new government in Baghdad, after the task of forming the government was officially assigned to the former deputy president, Adel Abdul Mahdi. Meanwhile, an Iraqi news website published that the Commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, Qasem Soleimani, recently warned the United States against targeting the Shi'ite militias operating in Iraq.

► Iran welcomed the election of Ziad Nakhala as the new Secretary General of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad group. The adviser of foreign affairs of the chairman of the Majlis declared that Iran's support for the "Palestinian resistance" will persist until the "liberation of Jerusalem."

## Iranian Involvement in Syria

► On the night of October 1, the IRGC launched a number of ballistic missiles toward the area of Albu Kamal in southeastern Syria in response to an attack, carried out on September 22 against a military parade in Ahvaz, southwestern Iran, which killed at least 25 people. According to Iranian reports, six missiles were fired from the Kermanshah region in western Iran for a range of 570 kilometers, passed in Iraqi air space and hit a headquarters of "armed groups" east of the Euphrates River in Syria. The missile launch was accompanied by strikes carried out by seven armed drones. According to Iran, a large number of terrorists connected to the attack on Ahvaz were killed and injured in the attacks. Iranian sources also claim that infrastructure and weapon depots used by the terrorists were also destroyed. The Commander of the IRGC's Aerospace Force, Amir Ali Hajizadeh, said that intelligence for the strike was provided by the IRGC's Qods Force, adding that it was impossible to use drones to collect intelligence since the area targeted is under American monitoring. He claimed that 40 ISIS militants were killed in the strike, including the Iraqi commander of the Mosul region in the organization, adding that all the targets of the attack were destroyed (Fars, October 2).

► The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported (October 2), that the missiles targeted the town of Hajjin under ISIS control near the Syria-Iraq border. According to SOHR, eight ISIS militants and/or their relatives were killed.

► The governor of the Kermanshah Province denied reports published in the media that alleged that one of the missiles launched toward Syria landed within the province. The Iranian news agency, Fars, reported that the missiles launched were of the Zolfagher model, which has a range of 750 kilometers, and the Qiam model, which has a range of 800 kilometers. One of the missiles bore the inscription: “death of America, death to Israel, death to the House of Saud” (Fars, October 1).



**The missile strike on eastern Syria (Tasnim, October 1 2018).**

- The Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bahram Qasemi, praised the missile strike carried out by the IRGC, stating that it proves Iran’s determination to fight terrorism (Tasnim, October 1).
- The Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces, Mohammad Baqeri, stated that the missile strike was the first stage in the revenge operation against the perpetrators of the attack on Ahvaz and that there will be additional stages. He asserted that Iran’s response demonstrates that Iran’s national security is a “red line” in the eyes of the Supreme Leader of Iran and its armed forces. He warned that Iran’s enemies must know that they will not be able to threaten its security. According to Baqeri, the drones used in the attack crossed the air space of several countries until reaching their target (Tasnim, October 1).



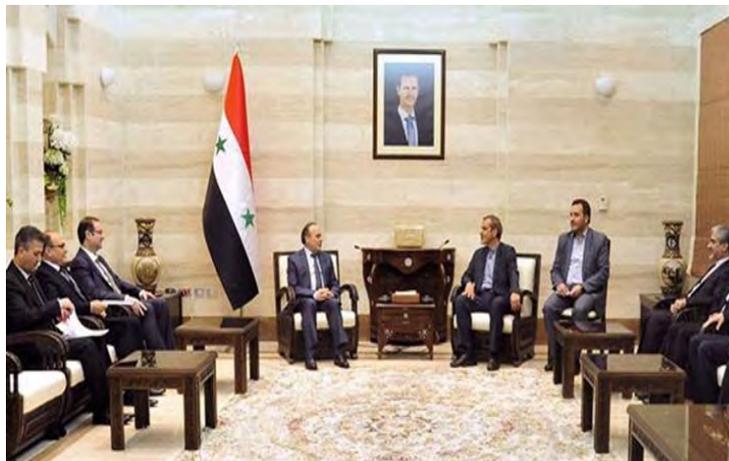
**The results of the strike in Hajjin as published by the IRGC (Tasnim, October 2 2018).**

- ▶ This is the second time that the IRGC launches missiles from western Iran toward targets in Syria. On June 18, 2017, the IRGC launched six surface-to-surface Zolfagher missiles from two bases in Kermanshah and Kurdistan in western Iran toward ISIS targets in eastern Syria in response to attacks carried out by the organization in the Majlis building the gravesite of Khomeini on June 7, 2017. In addition, on September 8, 2018, Iran launched missiles toward the headquarters of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) in northern Iraq.
- ▶ In late September, the Secretary of the Iranian Supreme National Security Council, Ali Shamkhani, met with the Secretary of the Russian Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev in Tehran and discussed with him developments in the region, and particularly Syria, and the security cooperation between the two countries. Shamkhani warned Israel of a forceful response, which will make it regret its actions, if it keeps acting against the forces fighting terrorism in Syria (Fars, September 27). The foreign ministers of Russia, Turkey and Iran also discussed the situation in Syria on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York.



**Ali Shamkhani (Fars, September 27 2018).**

- ▶ In a meeting with an academic delegation from Syria, Ali Akbar Velayati, the Adviser on International Affairs to the Supreme Leader of Iran, warned of “American and Zionist” attempts to partition Syria, as they have done in other places in the region. He declared that the “Resistance Front” will not allow the sever a single part of Syria’s land. Velayati added that Iran will remain in Syria as long as the Syrian government supports this and until Syria’s independence is completely secured (Tasnim, September 29).
- ▶ Last week, an Iranian economic delegation, led by Hassan Danaeifar, the Adviser to the First Deputy Iranian President and the head of the committee for fostering economic ties between Iran, Syria and Iraq, met the Syrian Prime Minister, Imad Khamis. In the meeting, Khamis asked Iranian firms to invest in Syria. The Iranian delegation discussed with the Syrian representatives plans for mutual investments of traders from both countries, and developing mechanisms to allow the countries to expand the volume of trade between them (Fars, September 25).



**The meeting of the Iranian economic delegation with the Syrian prime minister (Fars, September 25 2018).**

- ▶ In parallel to the visit of the Iranian delegation to Syria, 14 large Iranian firms from the construction, energy, telecommunications and petrochemical sectors participated in an international fair for Syria's reconstruction, held between October 2-6 in Damascus (IRNA, October 2). The participation of the Iranian firms in the fair provides further indication to Iran's effort to play a role in Syria's economic reconstruction after the end of the civil war.
- ▶ The Syrian Minister of Electricity, Mohammad Zuhair Kharboutli, paid a visit to Tehran in late September. During the visit, the two countries signed an agreement for cooperation in the electricity sector, which includes the establishment of a power plant by Iran in Lattakia, which would generate 540 megawatts. Khartabouli mentioned that the Lattakia power plant project is important and strategic for Syria's electric system, particularly in the Coastal region. He stated that the project is expected to be completed in three years (SANA, September 28).



**The Syrian minister of electricity (on the left) in Tehran (SANA, September 28 2018).**

## Iranian Involvement in Iraq

- ▶ The Iraqi news website al-Ghad Press reported that the Commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, Qasem Soleimani, recently warned the United States against trying to harm the Shi'ite militias in Iraq. According to this report, cited by Iranian media outlets, Soleimani proclaimed that "the gates of hell" will be opened on the United States, if it tries to attack the Shi'ite militias (the al-Hashd al-Shaabi, Popular Mobilization Units) and the forces of Islamic resistance in Iraq (Kayhan, September 25).
- ▶ The Iranian news website Fararu assessed (September 29), that the conflict between Iran and the United States on Iraqi soil has intensified in recent months and entered a new stage.

The expert on Middle Eastern affairs, Hassan Hanizadeh, said in an interview to the website that the United States and Saudi Arabia have tried to engender anti-Iranian sentiment in Iraq, but contrary to their expectations, they have discovered that this did not happen and they reached the conclusion that they are unable to close off Iraq's gates before Iran. The United States is trying, according to him, to exploit its ties to the Iraqi Baath Party to stymie Iranian influence in Iraq and isolate it, but it is struggling to do so because most Iraqis have a special connection to Iran. The Iranian commentator asserted that any harm to Iraq's security may threaten Iran's national security due to Iran's position in Iraq and the long border between the two countries.

► Last week, Iran made gains in its efforts to ensure that the new Iraqi government will act in accordance with Iranian interests, after the task of forming the new government was officially assigned to Adel Abdul Mahdi, who previously served as the vice president, the minister of finance and oil and is a member of the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, which is closely tied to Iran.

► Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani; the Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bahram Qasemi; and the Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, Iraj Masjedi, welcomed the selection of Bahram Salih for the position of Iraq's next president. They wished the newly elected president success in his role and expressed hope that the friendly relations between Iran and Iraq will be further expanded during his term in office (Mehr, October 3).

► On September 29, the Iranian Deputy Science Minister for International Affairs, Hossain Salar Amoli, met with representatives of the Iraqi embassy in Tehran, including the Iraqi Cultural Attaché, Yasser Abdul Zahra al-Hajjaj. In the meeting, the sides discussed expanding the scientific and academic cooperation between the two countries, including Iran's intention to establish universities in Iraq and joint technological and scientific parks. The Iraqi cultural attache emphasized his country's desire to expand the scientific cooperation between Iran and Iraq, and increase the number of Iraqi students attending Iranian universities (IRNA, September 29).

## **Iranian Involvement in the Palestinian Arena**

► Hossein Amir Abdollahian, the Adviser on Foreign Affairs of the Chairman of the Majlis, welcomed the election of Ziad Nakhala as the new leader of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad organization. Nakhala was elected as the new secretary general of the group instead of

Ramadan Shalah, who suffered a stroke several months ago. Abdollahian's statement stressed that Iran will maintain its support for the Palestinian people and the Palestinian "resistance" until the "liberation of Jerusalem" (Fars, September 30).