



Spotlight on Iran

October 7, 2018 – October 21, 2018

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Overview

- ▶ **Iran is intensifying the efforts to entrench its economic hold in the region:** the spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that Iran intends to participate in Syria's economic reconstruction through private-sector businesspeople, the Iranian ambassador to Damascus met with Syrian businesspeople and traders in Damascus and discussed increasing the economic cooperation between the two countries; meanwhile, the Iranian trade attaché in Baghdad announced that Iran will participate in next-month's international trade fair in Baghdad.
- ▶ Syrian opposition sources reported in recent weeks **that Iran removed all of its forces from the T-4 airbase near Homs and from the Deir Ezzor region in eastern Syria.** According to these reports, whose reliability is unclear, Russian forces replaced the Iranian troops. At this stage, it is unclear whether this is a withdrawal or a redeployment as part of the Iranian effort to embed fighters from pro-Iranian militias in Syrian Army units.
- ▶ Following the new appointments for Iraq's top leadership positions, the Iranian ambassador to Baghdad met, for the first time, Iraq's new President, Barham Salih, and Iraqi Prime Minister-designate, Adil Abdul-Mahdi. **These meetings are part of an Iranian effort to safeguard its interests and influence in Iraq following the formation of the new government.**

General Information

- ▶ In an interview to the Yemeni television network al-Masirah, the Commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), Mohammad Ali Jafari, stated that if in the past Iran was able to defend (without imposing itself on) the Middle East in 12 minutes, today it can do so in an even shorter period. He declared that Iran will never hesitate to act beyond its borders in cases of a threat to its security. He added that the "Resistance Front" has become stronger following the wars in Syria and Iraq, and that Iran will continue the struggle against the "Zionist entity" until its eradication (Tasnim, October 12).



The commander of the IRGC (Tasnim, October 12 2018).

Iranian Involvement in Syria and Lebanon

► The Speaker of the Majlis, Ali Larijani, who visited Turkey in early October to participate in an international parliamentary conference, assessed in an interview to the television network Russia Today (October 8) that Israel will be unable to carry out another “serious action” in Syria following the deployment of S-300 systems in the country. He asserted that it is Russia’s right to deploy the systems in Syria to protect its interests, particularly due to the attack on the Russian jet. Larijani also claimed that there is complete agreement between Russia and Iran regarding Syria.



The Speaker of the Majlis, Ali Larijani (Tasnim, October 9 2018).

► Syrian opposition sources reported in recent weeks that Iran removed its forces from several regions in Syria and that some of the Iranian troops were replaced by Russian forces. The news website al-Souria Net reported (October 8) that Iran withdrew its forces from the

Syrian air force base T-4 in the Homs region, which was previously attacked by Israel, and from the Deir Ezzor region in eastern Syria. According to the report, whose reliability is unclear, pro-Iranian militias recently withdrew from the town of al-Mayadin in Deir Ezzor and from the town of Mahkan and moved in the direction of Albu Kamal, after being replaced by Russian forces. The website reported that at this stage, it is still unclear whether this is a withdrawal or simply an Iranian redeployment intended to safeguard Iranian interests in Syria in tandem with Iranian efforts to integrate fighters from pro-Iranian militias in Syrian Army formations, and to increase Iran's reliance in Syria on local forces.

► Prior to this, the Syrian opposition newspaper, Enab Baladi, reported (October 2) about the withdrawal of Iranian forces from the T-4 airbase and their replacement by Russian soldiers, who intend to deploy in the base one of the S-300 air defense system recently transferred from Russia to Syria.

► In his weekly press conference, the Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bahram Qasemi, stated that Iran will participate in Syria's economic reconstruction "in light of the request of the Syrian government, the presence of Iranian military advisers in Syria, and the importance of Syria's reconstruction." He added that Iran intends to allow the Iranian private sector, commercial and manufacturing ventures and the technology sector to actively participate in Syria's reconstruction. He expressed hope that the conditions to allow the Iranian private sector to play a vital role in the reconstruction process will materialize as soon as possible (ISNA, October 15).

► Meanwhile, the Iranian Ambassador to Damascus, Javad Torkabadi, stated that Iranian and Syrian businesspeople need to become better acquainted with the economic opportunities in both countries to help develop the ties between them. In a meeting with Syrian businesspeople and traders in Damascus, the ambassador mentioned that Iranian and Syrian private sector investors formed good relations during the international fair for Syria's reconstruction held in early October in Damascus, adding that the businesspeople are working to develop the economic ties between Iran and Syria (Fars, October 15).



A meeting between the Iranian ambassador to Syria and Syrian businesspeople in Damascus (IRNA, October 15 2018).

► In a letter of condolences to the Secretary General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, on the occasion of the passing of Imad Mughniyeh's mother, the Commander of the IRGC, Mohammad Ali Jafari, emphasized the commitment of the IRGC to continue the struggle against the "Zionist regime" until its complete eradication. He claimed that the Zionist regime is approaching its end, day by day (Tasnim, October 11). The Commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, Qasem Soleimani, also sent a letter of condolences to Nasrallah, in which he called Mughniyeh's mother "the mother of Hezbollah." (al-Alam, October 10).



**The letter of condolences from Qasem Soleimani to Nasrallah
(al-Alam, October 10 2018).**

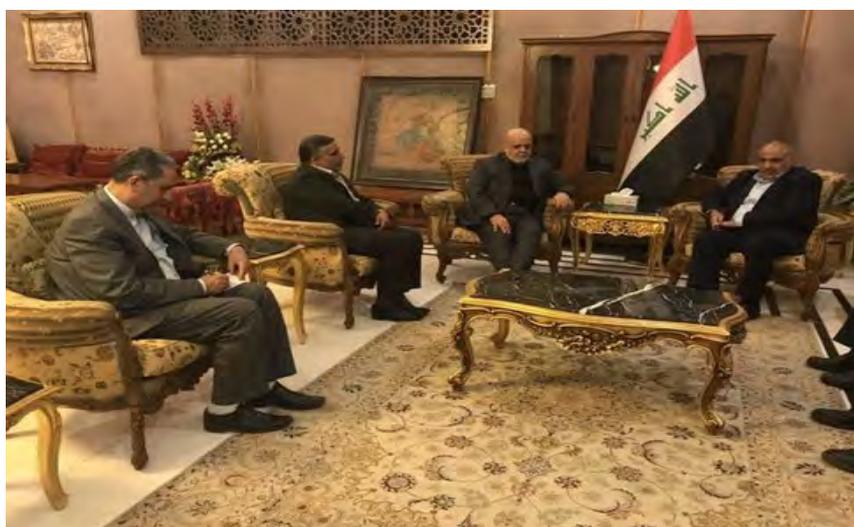
Iranian Involvement in Iraq

► On October 7, the Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad, Iraj Masjedi, met for the first time with Iraq's new President, Barham Salih. According to the report of the Fars news agency (October 8), Salih thanked Iran in the meeting for its participation in the campaign against ISIS. The incoming president also underlined the importance of the relationship between the two countries for maintaining security in the region. For his part, Masjedi stressed Iran's support for a "strong and independent" Iraq.



**The meeting between the Iranian ambassador to Baghdad and the Iraqi president
(Fars, October 7 2018).**

► On October 9, Masjedi met with the Prime Minister-designate, Adul Abdul-Mahdi, and discussed the two countries' relations and developments in the region (ISNA, October 9).



**The meeting of the Iranian ambassador to Iraq with the Iraqi prime minister-designate
(ISNA, October 9 2018).**

► The Iranian Trade Attaché in Baghdad, Naser Behzad, announced that Iran will participate in the international trade fair in Iraq, which will be held between November 10-19, 2018, and set to be attended by businesspeople from over 20 countries. During the fair, Iranian companies from the food, industry, textile, cosmetics, metal, machinery and handicraft sectors will showcase their products (IRNA, October 14).