



Spotlight on Iran

November 18 – December 2, 2018

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Overview

- ▶ The 32nd annual Islamic Unity Conference was held in Tehran and attended by Iranian senior officials and representatives from about 100 countries, including the Deputy Secretary General of Hezbollah, Naim Qassem. The Head of Hamas' Political Bureau, Ismail Haniyeh, gave a speech via video conference and thanked Iran for its support to the Palestinians. At the end of the conference, an advisor to the Iranian minister of foreign affairs said that the conference decided to adopt the families of those killed in protests along the fence in Gaza. Meanwhile, the organizers of the fence protests confirmed that Iran is financing the medical care for those injured in the protests and compensations for the families of those killed in them.
- ▶ The United States' Treasury Department announced the imposition of sanctions against a number of individuals and entities that operated as part of an Iranian-Russian network that provided millions of barrels of oil to the Syrian regime, which were used, in part, to finance the activities of Hezbollah and Hamas.
- ▶ According to Syrian sources cited in the newspaper al-Sharq al-Awsat, Iran recently stepped up its efforts to recruit Syrian citizens into pro-Iranian militias operating in northeastern Syria.
- ▶ Iran continues to exert effort to cement its economic foothold in Iraq, against the backdrop of the re-imposition of economic sanctions on Iran and the formation of the new government in Baghdad. The Iranian consul in Sulaymaniyah, northern Iraq, announced that Iran intends to open a new border crossing with Iraqi Kurdistan and also establish a free trade zone in the area.

General Information

- ▶ On November 24, the 32nd Islamic Unity Conference was held in Tehran with representatives of about 100 countries in attendance. The Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, declared during the conference's opening speech that Israel is a "cancerous tumor" that was

established in the region following World War II to serve the interests of the West. He asserted that even if Israel's existence is removed, Muslims must preserve their unity.

► In his speech, the Deputy Secretary General of Hezbollah, Sheikh Naim Qassem, proclaimed that U.S. sanctions will not force Iran to stop its support for the Resistance and Palestine. He argued that Muslim unity depends on continuing the Resistance in the battlefield, and this is what will allow the victory over the enemies of the Islamic nation.

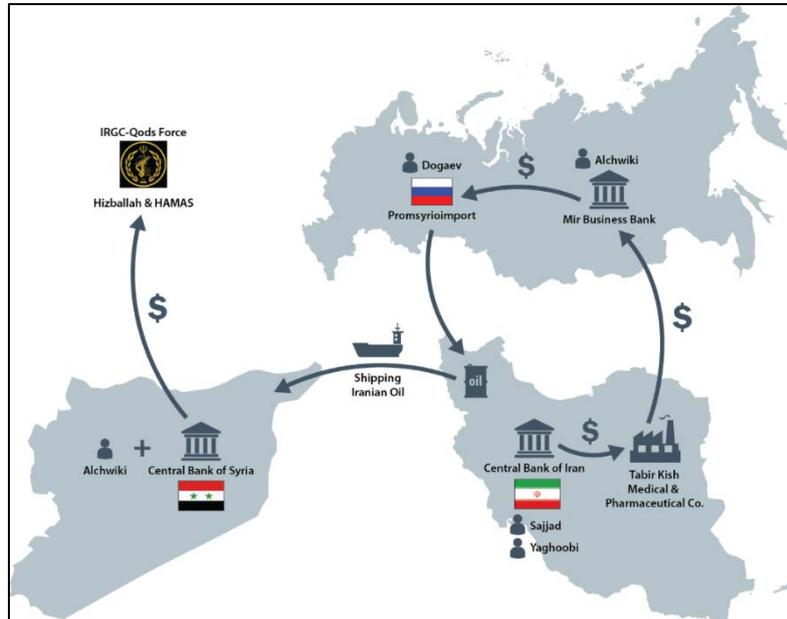
► The Head of Hamas' Political Bureau, Ismail Haniyeh, thanked Iran in a speech, broadcast via videoconference from the Gaza Strip, for standing by the Palestinians on the matter of Palestine and Jerusalem. He declared that Israel is the common enemy of the Muslim nation, and called to continue the struggle against it. He added that Gaza's military and political victory over Israel would have great consequences for the Palestinians' triumph in the conflict. Haniyeh stressed that Hamas will cooperate with any actor that helps it achieve the movement's goals (Tasnim, November 24).



The Islamic Unity Conference in Tehran (Tasnim, November 24 2018).

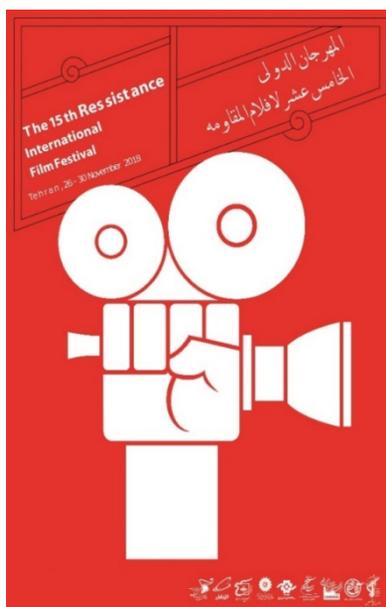
► The U.S. Treasury Department announced levying of sanctions against a number of individuals and bodies that operated as part of an Iranian-Russian network that provided millions of barrels of oil to the Syrian regime, and financed, among other entities, Hezbollah and Hamas. The oil barrels were transferred from Iran by Russian companies to the Assad regime in exchange for utilizing financial networks in Syria, which transferred funds from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) to Hezbollah and Hamas. Funds, which were transferred from the Iranian Central Bank to a Russian bank account via an Iranian company masquerading as a medical supplies business, were used by Syria to pay for the oil. Following these transactions, the Syrian regime allowed the transfer of hundreds of millions of dollars

to the IRGC's Qods Force, to be used to finance Hamas and Hezbollah (U.S. Treasury Department website, November 20).



The Iranian-Russian network used to transfer oil to Syria and to finance Hezbollah and Hamas (U.S. Treasury Department website, November 20 2018).

► The 15th Resistance International Film Festival was held in Tehran on November 26-30. The festival, held annually in Tehran, showcased 12 feature films and 22 documentaries from around the world dealing with different topics related to “Islamic Resistance” including: the struggle against Israel, Zionism, the United States, Saudi Arabia and ISIS, and the civil wars in Syria and Yemen. The festival’s opening ceremony was attended by the Commander of the IRGC, Mohammad Ali Jafari, and the Commander of the IRGC’s Basij Force, Gholam-Hossein Gheybparvar (Tasnim, November 26).



Poster advertising the 2018 Resistance Film Festival.

Iranian Involvement in Syria

► The 11th round of talks concerning the settlement of the conflict in Syria was held on November 28-29 in Astana, the Kazakh capital. The talks were attended by representatives of Russia, Iran, Turkey, the Syrian regime and the Syrian opposition. The Iranian delegation to the talks was headed by Hossein Jaber Ansari, the Senior Advisor to the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs. The talks focused on the ceasefire in Idlib governorate and the efforts to establish a constitutional committee in Syria. Ahead of this round of talks, the Deputy Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergei Vershinin, met with the Iranian Ambassador to Moscow, Mehdi Sanaei, and discussed the preparations for the Astana talks and cooperation between the two countries (IRNA, November 27).



The meeting between the Iranian Advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein Jaber Ansari, and the Syrian Ambassador to the United Nations, Bashar Jaafari in Astana (SANA, November 28 2018).

- ▶ The Commander of the IRGC, Mohammad Ali Jafari, stated in a press conference that due to the ongoing peace talks held between Iran, Russia and Turkey, the Syrian government has asked Iran to organize peacekeeping units in the area of Idlib and northwestern Aleppo. He added that at the current time, there are no clashes in Syria and it was decided to deploy a limited number of peacekeeping forces in this area (ISNA, November 15). Mohammad Jafari did not mention the identity of those forces or the numbers deployed.
- ▶ The pan-Arab daily al-Sharq al-Awsat reported (November 23) based on Syrian sources that Iran recently intensified its efforts to recruit Syrian citizens west of the Euphrates River to pro-Iranian militias operating in northeastern Syria. These sources reported that dozens of Syrian citizens from the Deir Ezzor region have recently joined the ranks of pro-Iranian militias operating under the guidance of the IRGC through volunteer recruitment centers that were opened in the town of al-Mayadin and other points west of the Euphrates. According to these reports, some of the volunteers previously fought in the ranks of the Syrian opposition while some are civilians wishing to volunteer in the militias' ranks in exchange for a monthly salary of \$150.
- ▶ The Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bahram Qasemi, condemned the firing of mortars that allegedly contained chlorine gas against a neighborhood in the western outskirts of Aleppo city. The Syrian regime accused Hayat Tahrir al-Sham of firing the mortars on November 24, while rebel groups affiliated with the Free Syrian Army denied the charges and claimed that this was a "fabrication of the regime." In his weekly press conference, Qasemi labeled the mortar attack "ugly and inhumane" and stated that these actions by "terrorist groups" provide proof of the political, military and financial support these groups enjoy from some countries in the region as well as foreign powers (IRNA, November 25).

Iranian Involvement in Iraq

- ▶ The Iranian Consul General in Sulaymaniyah in northern Iraq, Saadullah Masoudian, reported that Iran is working to open a new border crossing with Iraqi Kurdistan and to establish a free trade zone in the area of the Bashmagh border crossing. He mentioned that the Kurdish Regional Government expressed willingness to open a new border crossing with Iran. Officials at the Kurdish Chamber of Industry and Trade in Sulaymaniyah mentioned that the trade volume between Iran and Iraqi Kurdistan amounts to \$6.8 billion annual. According

to the Iranian consulate in Sulaymaniyah, there are plans in place to increase the annual trade volume to ten billion dollars (ISNA, November 27).

Iranian Involvement in the Palestinian Arena

- ▶ Ali Saeedi, the Head of the Ideological-Political Bureau at the office of the Commander-in-Chief of Iran's Armed Forces, declared that Iran will continue to support the Palestinians with all its might in their struggle against Israel. In a speech given before clerics serving in the Iranian Armed Forces, Saeedi proclaimed that those who intended to rule from the Nile to the Euphrates [meaning Israel] now can not sleep due to fear of Hamas (Fars, November 20).
- ▶ The organizers of the protests along the Gaza fence confirmed that Iran is financing the medical care of those injured in the protests and the compensation for the families of those killed there. Hussein Mansour, a member of the organizing committee of the protests, stated that is an important act by Iran as part of the support for the Palestinian people and the resistance. He called on the Arab world to act in the same vein and support the Palestinian people (Maan News Agency, November 27).
- ▶ Meanwhile, Hossein Sheikholeslam, an Advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Secretary General of the Islamic Unity Conference held in Tehran, confirmed to the Hamas media outlet al-Risala (November 27) that the Conference decided to adopt the families of those killed in the fence protests. He added that this decision has been forwarded to the relevant authorities for implementation, which will occur shortly.
- ▶ The Representative of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad organization in Tehran, Nasser Abu Sharif, remarked in an interview to the Tasnim news agency (November 27) that Iran is the only country that supported the "Resistance" without regard to the threats of the United States, since Iran sees the assistance and support for the Resistance as a religious, humanistic and moral duty, which is not exclusive to Iran but is an important obligation for the entire Muslim nation. In the interview, held on the sidelines of the Islamic Unity Conference held in Tehran, Abu Sharif thanked Iran for its support for the "Palestinian Resistance" and asserted that the Palestinian victory over Israel will be achieved thanks to the Resistance and Iran's assistance.



**Nasser Abu Sharif, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad Representative in Iran
(Tasnim, November 27 2018).**