



# Spotlight on Iran

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## Overview

- **In the political sphere: Iran, Russia and Turkey are preparing for another summit of the three countries' presidents, set to be held in Ankara in August.** While Israel and Russia continue to coordinate their positions in light of developments in Syria, a member of the Majlis National Security and Foreign Policy Committee declared that despite the close ties between Russia and Israel, Tehran has been able to maximize the utility of the “Russian card” in its activities in Syria, in line with Russian interests. He also asserted that Iran will continue to maintain its presence in Syria.
- **In the economic sphere: In recent weeks, Iran has stepped up efforts to expand its economic influence in Syria and Iraq, signaling its desire to increase its economic clout in the region.** A senior Iranian official stated in an interview that by the end of the year, the management of the Lattakia Port will be handed over to Iran. Meanwhile, an economic delegation from Iran is set to visit Syria soon to examine the needs of the Syrian market. In addition, a memorandum of understanding for cooperation in the sphere of labor and an agreement concerning joint manufacturing of Iranian vehicles in Syria were signed between the Iranian labor and welfare ministers of Iran and Syria. Finally, the Iranian minister of transportation announced that the implementation of the project to lay down a railway from western Iran to southern Iraq will commence in three months.
- Following the completion of formation of the new Iraqi cabinet, the Iranian ambassador to Baghdad met with the incoming Iraqi Minister of Interior, Yassin al-Yasiri, while the Iranian military attaché to Baghdad met with the incoming Minister of Defense, Najah al-Shammari. Amir Hatami, the Iranian Minister of Defense, invited his counterpart for a visit in Tehran.
- The commentator Hamza Abu Shanab, who is affiliated with the Hamas movement, published an article in al-Risala, the official publication of the Palestinian militant group, **in which he detailed Iranian assistance to Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.** According to the commentator, **the assistance includes providing materiel, rockets, development of**

**rockets and tunnels, and ongoing regular financial support** for the activities of the militant Palestinian organizations.

## Iranian Involvement in Syria

- ▶ Alaeddin Boroujerdi, a Member of the Majlis Committee on National Security and Foreign Policy, asserted that despite the close-knit relationship between Israel and Russia, Iran has been able to maximize the utility of the “Russian card” in its activities in Syria, based on Russia’s national and regional interests. In a lecture delivered at the Center for International Studies in Tehran, Boroujerdi defined President Putin’s support for Bashar al-Assad as a defeat for the United States and the West in Syria. He added that Iran will continue to maintain its presence in Syria and Iraq in the post-ISIS era, and that despite its economic vulnerability, Iran has been able to shift the balance of power in its favor (ISNA, June 30).
- ▶ The Spokesman of the Presidential Palace of Turkey, Ibrahim Kalin, announced that the summit of the Iranian, Russian and Turkish presidents concerning Syria will be held in Ankara in August 2019. He stated that the summit will focus on developments in Idlib and other regions in Syria, the security situation in the country, and the negotiations concerning the settlement of the war and the summit set to deliberate on drafting a new Syrian constitution (Hurriyet, July 4).
- ▶ In early July, Ali-Asghar Khaji, the Senior Adviser on Political Affairs of the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, met with Syrian Foreign Minister, Walid al-Muallem. In the meeting, the two officials discussed ongoing coordination between Tehran and Damascus regarding the negotiations to end the war in Syria, relations between the two countries, and developments in the regional and international arena. The meeting was held against the backdrop of escalating tensions between the United States and Iran in the Persian Gulf and tightening American sanctions against Iran (Tasnim, July 2). Meanwhile, the Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister, Faysal al-Miqdad, defined relations between Iran and Syria as “strategic.” In a press conference held in Damascus, Miqdad stated that the two countries are examining how to implement the hundreds of economic and political agreements signed between the two countries’ leaders, to bolster cooperation between the in light of the economic sanctions against Iran (Tasnim, July 3).



**The meeting of Syrian minister of foreign affairs with the adviser of the Iranian minister of foreign affairs (Tasnim, July 2, 2019)**

- ▶ In an interview to the newspaper Vatan-e Emrooz (July 3), Hassan Danaeifar, the Secretary of the Office for Developing Economic Ties between Iran, Iraq and Syria, stated that the management of the Lattakia Port will be handed over by the end of the year (probably the Iranian year, which ends on March 20). He did not elaborate whether he is referring to the management of the entire port or merely specific activities or sections in the port. He remarked that many companies and ports in Syria were previously managed by foreign firms, and that serious negotiations were held on the matter, adding that the agreement will be implemented as soon as possible. According to the Iranian official, the Lattakia Port in western Syria is one of the most important trade zones in the region, which could expand the scope of relations between the countries of the region.
- ▶ Keyvan Kashefi, a Member of the Board of Governors of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce and the Head of the Joint Iranian-Syrian Economic Committee, stated that in the coming weeks, a conference is set to be held in the Kermanshah Province in western Iran, focusing on the needs of the Syrian market, noting the big differences between them and the needs of the Iraqi market. He remarked that following the civil war, Syria now requires mostly the rehabilitation of infrastructure such as dams, water networks and the electricity grid. He added that in the coming weeks, an economic delegation will be dispatched from Iran to Syria to study the needs of the market in Syria and the state of infrastructure of the country. According to Kashefi, opening a trade line between Iran and Syria through Iraq will offer a great deal of economic opportunities for the countries involved (Tasnim, July 7).



**Keyvan Kashefi, the Head of the Joint Iranian-Syrian Economic Committee  
(Tasnim, July 7, 2019)**

► Last week, the Iranian Minister of Cooperatives, Labor and Welfare, Mohammad Shariatmadari, and the Syrian Minister of Labor and Welfare, Rima Qaditi, signed a memorandum of understanding concerning cooperation between the two countries in the next five years in the sphere of labor. The memorandum details, among other plans, the training of technical and professional coaches, and sending workers from Iran to Syria. Shariatmadari stated that Iran is willing to play a role in Syria's post-war reconstruction and transfer technological knowledge to it. The Syrian minister of labor and welfare proclaimed that Syria expects the Iranian government to assist Syria in the country's reconstruction. During the visit of the Syrian minister of labor and welfare to Tehran, the two ministers also inked an agreement concerning the joint manufacture of Iranian vehicles in Syria (IRNA, July 10; Fars, July 12).



**Signing of a cooperation agreement between the Syrian and Iranian ministers of welfare and labor (IRNA, July 10, 2019)**

► On July 4, the British Navy and authorities in Gibraltar captured a tanker suspected of transferring crude oil from Iran to Syria. The tanker sailed under the flag of Panama and belongs to a Singapore-based company. The Prime Minister of Gibraltar, Fabian Picardo, stated that the law-enforcement agencies in the British territory acted with the assistance of

British Navy Special Forces in the Gibraltar Port to apprehend the ship and the cargo is carried, after receiving information from intelligence agencies. According to this information, the tanker operated in violation of European Union sanctions placed on Syria. Ship-tracking shows that the tanker was loaded in mid-April in the Iranian oil terminal on the island of Kharg in the Persian Gulf. After the ship docked for several weeks off of the coast of the United Arab Emirates, it sailed around the southern cape of Africa, passing through Cape Town in early June (Reuters, Bloomberg, July 4). The Iranian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abbas Araghchi, labeled the stoppage of the tanker as a “pirate move” and claimed that the tanker was not sailing to Syria, and that such a large tanker can not even dock in the port in Syria. He mentioned that due to the volume of the tanker, it passed through the Straits of Gibraltar instead of the Suez Canal and called for its immediate release. Araghchi did not mention what was the planned destination of the tanker (Fars, July 7).

## Iranian Involvement in Iraq

► The Iranian Minister of Transportation, Kheirollah Khademi, announced that the implementation of the project of laying down the railway from Shalamche in western Iran to Basra in southern Iraq will commence in three months. In a meeting of the directors of railways in Iran, Iraq and Syria, held in Tehran on July 1, Khademi noted that Iran is ready to begin executing the project and expects the Iraqi government to allocate the necessary land for implementing it. During the meeting, the officials also discussed linking the railway to the Bandar Imam Khomeini Port in Khuzestan Province in southwestern Iran to the Lattakia Port in Syria. The Director of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways company, Saeed Rasouli, remarked during the meeting that the first phase of the project, the connection of the railways between the two ports, will begin in the Khoramshahr Free Trade Zone in western Iran. He argued that the railway axis, which in the future will link Iran to Syria, is of great importance because the Khuzestan is a center of steel manufacture and agriculture (ISNA, July 1).



**The meeting of directors of railway companies from Syria, Iraq and Iran  
(ISNA, July 1, 2019)**

- ▶ In May, the Iranian government approved the launch of the project to lay the railways. The Foundation of the Oppressed, which is considered the largest charitable fund in Iran, will serve as the contractor executing the project and will fund 60% of its costs. The Ministry of Transportation of Iran will bear the rest of the costs. The railway, whose construction has been delayed by eight years, will initially serve mainly Iranian pilgrims who annually visit Karbala in Iraq. In the next stage, the railway is supposed to connect Iran through Iraq to the Lattakia Port in Syria, mainly for the purpose of transferring goods. The completion of the first phase of the project is set to take about two years (Fars, May 25).
- ▶ In early July, the Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad, Iraj Masjedi, met for the first time with the incoming Iraqi Minister of Interior, Yasin al-Yasiri. In the meeting, the Iranian ambassador underlined Iran's support for the development, security and stability of Iraq. Masjedi congratulated the minister for his appointment by the Iraqi Parliament and wished him success in his work. Al-Yasiri thanked Iran for its support in the war against ISIS and mentioned that he will soon arrive for a visit in Tehran to discuss the role of the Iraqi Ministry of Interior in facilitating the 'Arbaeen events, the pilgrimage to Shi'ite holy sites in Iraq, set to be held in October 2019, forty days after the fast of 'Ashura (ISNA, July 1).
- ▶ Meanwhile, the Iranian Military Attaché to Baghdad, Mostafa Moradian, met with the incoming Iraqi Minister of Defense, Najjah al-Shammari, and congratulated him for his appointment. According to the statement issued by the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, the two discussed bilateral relations and Iranian-Iraqi cooperation in the war on terror (ISNA, June 30). The Iranian Minister of Defense, Amir Hatami, also congratulated the incoming Iraqi minister of defense. In a phone call, Hatami invited al-Shammari to visit Tehran and expressed hope for bolstering military and security cooperation between the two countries (Mehr, July 4).



**The meeting between the Iranian military attaché to Baghdad and the incoming minister of defense (ISNA, June 30, 2019)**

## Iranian Involvement in the Palestinian Arena

► Al-Risalah, the Hamas-run newspaper, published (June 28) an article authored by the commentator Hamza Abu Shanab, who is affiliated with the organization, in which he provided an overview of the evolution of Iranian assistance to Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, detailing the assistance in the political, military, economic, media and social spheres. According to Abu Shanab, the Iranian assistance includes provision of weaponry and rockets; training to dozens of “Resistance” fighters and transfer of military and intelligence knowledge, planning for development of rockets and tunnels; regular financial support for the Palestinian organizations that has been ongoing for years, totaling in dozens of millions of dollars. According to the commentator, Iran’s support for the organizations is strategic and is intended to compel the complete withdrawal of the “Israeli enemy” from the Palestinian lands occupied since 1948.