



Spotlight on Iran

October 20 – November 3, 2019

Author: Dr. Raz Zimmt

Overview

- ▶ The responses of Iranian officials to the assassination of ISIS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, reflected an Iranian attempt to minimize the significance of the American action and attribute it to domestic political calculations in the United States. Iranian officials emphasized that Baghdadi's assassination does not mean the end of ISIS as an organization, which, in their view, was created by the United States.
- ▶ Iran welcomed the agreement reached between the Russian and Turkish presidents concerning the withdrawal of Kurdish militias in northeastern Syria, and expressed hope that the agreement will assuage Turkey's security concerns and preserve the territorial integrity of the Syrian state.
- ▶ Following the protests in Lebanon and Iraq, Iranian officials, chief among them Supreme Leader Khamenei, blamed the United States, Israel and Saudi Arabia for fomenting the protests. Tehran's response reflects a growing concern due to the destabilization of the current political orders in Lebanon and Iraq and the implications for Iranian interests there. The renewal of protests in Iraq is of particular concern to Tehran, since protesters in southern Iraq have chanted against Iran and its involvement in Iraq, surrounded the Iranian consulate in Karbala and tore posters of Iran's supreme leader. The spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that Iran is closely following developments in Iraq. The editor of the hardline daily Kayhan called on Iraqi protesters to take over the embassies of the United States and Saudi Arabia in Baghdad, which according to him, are responsible for organizing the protests.
- ▶ Against the backdrop of ongoing efforts to end the war in Yemen, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs met in Tehran the spokesman of the Houthi rebels in Yemen and discussed the latest developments in the country and ongoing political negotiations concerning the settlement of the war in Yemen.

Iranian Involvement in Syria and Lebanon

- The responses of senior Iranian official to the assassination of ISIS leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, reflected an Iranian attempt to minimize the significance of the American action and attribute it to domestic political calculations in the United States. The Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abbas Mousavi, stated in response to al-Baghdadi's assassination that those who eliminated ISIS were the youth of the "Resistance," the people and government in Syria and Iraq, with support of the Islamic Republic of Iran. He remarked that Iran does not see the elimination of the organization's leader as the end of terrorism and of ISIS and warns of U.S. efforts to reorganize and empower the remnants of the organizations still in the region. Mousavi claimed that Baghdadi's killing is not a major development and stemmed from domestic political calculations connected to the upcoming elections in the United States (IRNA, October 28).
- The Spokesman of the Iranian Government, Ali Rabe'i, responded to al-Baghdadi's assassination with a post on his Twitter account (October 27), writing that his death is the end of the symbol of destructive terrorism, but it will not bring about the end of the phenomenon that is ISIS, similar to how the assassination of Osama Bin Laden did not dry the roots of terrorism. He asserted that eliminating ISIS' terrorism requires drying the two main hotbeds of the organization: the Petro-dollars of the region and Sunni takfiri thinking.
- The Iranian Minister of Communication, Mohammad Javad Azari Jahromi, tweeted in response to President Trump's announcement of the assassination on al-Baghdadi that "it's not a big deal to kill your own creation" (October 27).



**“With the killing of Baghdadi, Syria’s oil is ours”
(Tasnim, October 28, 2019)**

► The Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abbas Mousavi, welcomed the agreement reached between the Russian and Turkish presidents regarding the withdrawal of the Kurdish militias in northeastern Syria 30 kilometers from the Turkish border. Mousavi described the agreement as “a positive step for returning stability and quiet to the region.” He expressed hope that the agreement will assuage Turkey’s security concerns while preserving Syria’s territorial integrity. He emphasized the need for a withdrawal of American forces from the region to ensure the return of security (ISNA, October 23).

► The Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohammad Javad Zarif, stated in a joint press conference with the Turkish and Russian foreign ministers in Geneva that Iran will remain in Syria for as long as Syria desires so. He remarked that Iran believes that all of Syria’s land should be under the control of Syrian Army and that the government of Syria should be responsible for maintaining internal security and along its borders. In the joint statement, the three foreign ministers asserted their commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Syria and welcomed the start of the work of the constitutional committee (IRNA, October 30).



**The joint press conference of the Turkish, Russian and Iranian ministers of foreign affairs
(Tasnim, October 30, 2019)**

► In a first official Iranian response to the protests in Lebanon, the Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abbas Mousavi, declared that Iran does not meddle in the internal affairs of Lebanon and opposes foreign intervention in the internal affairs of other countries. He expressed hope that calm will return to Lebanon, through cooperation and coordination between all parties, groups and political actors in Lebanon (Fars, October 21).

► Following Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri's resignation, Mousavi expressed hope that “the people and government in Lebanon will successfully overcome this dangerous and sensitive

time.” He emphasized that Iran sees the need for unity between all sects, parties and political figures in Lebanon to maintain stability and security in the country, as well as the need to answer the legitimate demands of the Lebanese people in a calm environment (Tasnim, October 29).

► The Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, also addressed developments in Lebanon and said that Iran has always stood by the side of the people and government in Lebanon. He added that Tehran believes that preserving Lebanon’s security, peace and stability is possible through addressing the needs and legitimate rights of the citizenry. He called on the government and parties in Lebanon to make their country safer and more stable (ISNA, October 21).

► In a first statement addressing the protests in Lebanon and Iraq, the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, blamed Iran’s enemies for trying to destabilize security and stability in the region. In a speech during a military ceremony in Tehran, Khamenei alleged that the United States and Western intelligence services, operating with the financial support of the “reactionary countries” in the region, are working to deprive the citizens of several countries of the region of their security. He asserted that those concerned about Iraq and Lebanon should, first-and-foremost, address their insecurity created by the United State and its allies. . Khamenei added that the demands of the citizens of Lebanon and Iraq are legitimate, but they must know, that they can only realize them within the legal structures of their countries (Fars, October 30).

► Meanwhile, Iranian hardline media outlets blamed Saudi Arabia, the United States and Israel of inflaming protests in Lebanon. The newspaper Javan claimed (October 21), that the violent events in Iraq and Lebanon are a result of a Saudi effort to topple the government in Baghdad and Beirut, Iran’s allies. The presence and growing influence of forces close to Iran in Lebanon and Iraq, the defeat of ISIS in Syria, the creation of the land corridor from Tehran to the Mediterranean, and the defeat of Saudi Arabia in Yemen, all led to this Saudi attempt to topple the government of Lebanon and Iraq and try to create a new front of confrontation with Iran, which could replace Yemen.

► The newspaper Khorasan also claimed that foreign actors are involved in the protests in Lebanon. A commentary published by the paper (October 21) claimed that the protests in Lebanon started due to economic causes, but the Mossad and CIA played a central role in

turning them violent, and exploiting the economic crisis to cast the blame for the situation on Hezbollah.

► The Iranian news agency, Tasnim, quoted (October 26) a report published in the Hezbollah-linked website, al-Ahed, which claimed that the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Beirut is financing the logistic expenses of the protests, including transportation, sound systems, Lebanese flags, medical services, and provision of water and food to protesters. In addition, the embassy pays, according to this report, \$100 dollars for every protester during the day and \$150 for every night-time protester.



The United States, Saudi Arabia and Israel “riding the wave of popular demands in Lebanon and Iraq,” (Tasnim, October 26, 2019)

► Against the backdrop of the protests in Lebanon, the Chairman of the Lebanese Movement of Democratic Change, Elie Mahfoud, claimed that the Commander of the Qods Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), Qasem Soleimani, arrived in Beirut. In a tweet (posted on October 23), Mahfoud wondered whether Soleimani’s visit to Lebanon is connected to the statements of Hezbollah Secretary General, Hassan Nasrallah, about the need to prevent the fall of the Lebanese government. There is no confirmation for this claim about Soleimani’s arrival in Lebanon from any other source.

Iranian Involvement in Iraq and Yemen

► Following the renewal of protests in Iraq, senior Iranian officials and Iranian media outlets again accused the United States and its allies of fueling protests. During the rallies in southern Iraq, protesters chanted against Iranian meddling in Iraq and in the city of Karbala, surrounded the Iranian consulate, tore the posters bearing the image of Supreme Leader Khamenei and chanted against the Commander of the Qods Force, Qasem Soleimani. The

Senior Adviser to the Chairman of the Majlis, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, accused on his Twitter account (October 25) the United States, the 'Zionist regime' (Israel), and Saudi Arabia of trying to exploit the genuine demands of the Iraqi people to undermine the stability and security in the country and topple the Baghdad government, to pave the way for foreign intervention.

► The Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abbas Mousavi, expressed sorrow about recent events in Iraq, which led to the death and injury of dozens of people and damage to public property, and remarked that Iran is closely following events in Iraq. He stated that Iran supports the demands of the Iraqi people, which were confirmed by the Iraqi prime minister and senior Shi'ite clerics, and expressed confidence in the ability of the government, the people and senior religious clerics in Iraq to overcome the challenges through unity. Mousavi emphasized that since the establishment of the 'new Iraq,' Iran has supported the government and the people and stood by its neighbor during difficult times (Fars, October 26).

► Following the renewal of protests in Iraq, the Editor of the hardline daily Kayhan, Hossein Shariatmadari, called on "the Iraqi revolutionary youth" and the Shi'ite militias in Iraq to take over the embassies of the United States and Saudi Arabia in Baghdad. Shariatmadari claimed that there is clear evidence pointing to the involvement of these embassies in orchestrating the riots, and therefore, they need to be taken over, similarly to the takeover of the U.S. embassy in Tehran in November 1979 (Kayhan, October 30).

► 112 Iranian companies in the fields of technology, communications, construction, food, transportation and industry are set to participate in the 46th International Trade Fair set to take place in November in Baghdad. The official in charge of the Iranian pavilion at the fair, Alireza Sadrzadeh, stated that the Iranian section in the fair will be the largest among all participating countries and will be spread out over 2,500 square meters (269,00 square feet), spanning about 15% of the entire grounds of the fair (Tasnim, October 28).

► On October 28, Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, met in Doha, Qatar, the President of the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq, Nechirvan Barzani. In the meeting, held on the sidelines of a regional security conference, the two officials discussed developments in Iraq and northern Syria (Fars, October 28).



**The meeting between the Iranian minister of foreign affairs and Nechirvan Barzani
(Fars, October 26, 2019)**

► On October 26, Iranian Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, met in Tehran with Muhammad Abd al-Salam, the Spokesman of the Ansar Allah Movement (the Houthi rebels in Yemen). Zarif reiterated the need for a political solution to the crisis in Yemen and Iran's support for establishing a ceasefire and dialogue between the different groups in Yemen. He emphasized Iran's willingness to offer humanitarian assistance to Yemen. The spokesman of the Houthis thanked Zarif for Iran's support for the Yemeni people and updated him on the latest developments in Yemen and efforts to settle the civil war (ISNA, October 26).



**The meeting between the spokesman of the Houthis of Yemen and Iranian foreign minister
(ISNA, October 26, 2019)**