



Spotlight on Iran

November 3, 2019 – November 17, 2019

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Overview

- ▶ **Iran vociferously condemned the IDF's targeted killing of the senior Palestinian Islamic Jihad Commander, Bahaa' Abu al-'Ata.** The spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs labeled the targeted killing "a terror attack" and called to prosecute Israeli leaders as war criminals. The Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), Hossein Salami, declared that the world of Islam is losing its patience with Israel's activities and if the "Zionist regime" persists with its criminal acts, it will lay the groundwork for its own demise. **Iranian media coverage of the latest** round of escalation in Gaza highlighted the massive volleys of rockets fired toward Israel. Meanwhile, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani declared at the start of an international Muslim unity conference in Tehran that Palestine and Jerusalem are the most important issues for the Muslim world, and that Muslim public opinion will not allow the enemies of the Muslims to cast these issues into oblivion.
- ▶ In early November, **Iran and Syria signed an agreement on cooperation in the electricity sector, which includes the expansion and rehabilitation of Syria's electrical grid by Iranian firms.** During the ceremony concluding the agreement, the Iranian minister of energy stated that the electrical grids of the two countries will be connected in the future through the Iraqi electrical grid.
- ▶ Against the backdrop of ongoing protests in Iraq, **Iran is working to mediate between the Shi'ite factions in the Iraqi parliament to end the ongoing crisis.** The Commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, Qasem Soleimani, has taken the lead in overseeing this effort. According to Arab and Western sources, Soleimani met with the Shi'ite Iraqi leader Moqtada al-Sadr, in an effort to reach an understanding that would demobilize Sadr and his supporters who are protesting against Adel Abdul Mahdi's government. The Iranian mediation efforts went into higher gear after the Iranian consulate in Karbala in southern Iraq was attacked (November 3) by dozens of Iraqi protesters.

Iranian Involvement in Syria

► Iran and Syria signed a cooperation agreement in the electricity sector that would entail expanding and rehabilitating the Syrian electric grid by Iranian private and public companies. The Iranian Minister of Energy, Reza Ardakanian, stated during the agreement signing ceremony, that the Syrian and Iranian electric grids will be connected in the future through Iraq's electric grid. He asserted that the electrical industry has an important role in expanding cooperation between the countries of the region. The Syrian Minister of Electricity, Mohammad Zuhair Kharboutli remarked that soon, joint committees will be established to oversee the implementation of agreements signed between the two countries (IRNA, November 2).

► In March 2019, the Syrian ministerial committee on economic affairs approved an agreement signed between the Syrian ministry of electricity and the Iranian energy and infrastructure conglomerate, MAPNA, to establish a power generation station, producing 526 megawatts, to be built on the Lattakia coast. The agreement to establish the station was signed during a visit of the Syrian minister of electricity to Tehran in September 2018.



The Iranian minister of energy and Syrian minister of electricity during a joint press conference (IRNA, November 2, 2019)

Iranian Involvement in Iraq

► In light of the ongoing protests in Iraq, it has been reported that Iran began mediating between the Shi'ite factions in the Iraqi parliament to restore order. The Iranian website Fararu reported, based on Arab and Western source, that Iran is mediating between the Shi'ite Iraqi leader Moqtada al-Sadr, who head the Sairoon Coalition, and Hadi al-Ameri, the leader of the al-Fath bloc, representing the Shi'ite militias, in an effort to find a possible

replacement to the current Prime Minister, Adel Abdul Mahdi. Meanwhile, it was reported that al-Sadr, who recently returned to Iraq after a long stay in the Iranian city of Qom, has once again returned to Iran, possibly due to the ongoing Iranian mediation efforts (Fararu, November 3). On November 4, the Lebanese daily al-Akhbar reported that prior to leaving to Iran, al-Sadr held a lengthy meeting with Soleimani in the city of Najaf. The two apparently reached an agreement under which Sadr would stop supporting actions against the Abdul Mahdi government, in exchange for bolstering the government and altering its composition. According to this report, Tehran rebuked Sadr for his support for the protests, but emphasized that he is the main actor who can solve the political crisis in Iraq and calm the public, adding that he is always welcome in Tehran.

► On November 3, dozens of protesters attacked the Iranian consulate in Karbala. They scaled the barricades surrounding the consulate, removed the Iranian flag and raised the Iraqi flag instead. Following these events, the Iranian Consul to Karbala, Masoud Hosseinian-Mir, stated that the situation around the consulate has been calmed down, following the intervention of Iraqi security forces, and that the situation is under control (ISNA, November 4). Despite this, the Iranian consulate recommended to Iranian pilgrims interested in visiting the Shi'ite holy sites in Najaf and Karbala to delay their visit to Iraq (Fars, November 4).



**Iraqi protesters in front of the Iranian consulate in Karbala
(ISNA, November 4, 2019)**

► In response to the attack on the Iranian consulate in Karbala, the Iranian website Asr-e Iran published (November 4) a commentary criticizing radical Iranian commentators and media outlets, which are contributing to anti-Iranian sentiments in Iraq. The article argued that the attack on the Iranian consulate was carried out by a handful of extremists who do not represent the Iraqi public, and that Iranians are still welcomed by the Iraqi people, as was

evident last month during the arbayeen ceremonies (the pilgrimage marking the end of the 40 days of mourning following the death of the Shi'ite Imam Hussein). Iraqis know well that Iran and the IRGC are the ones who helped Iraq when ISIS took over a fourth of their country's territory. However, Iraqis too have national honor and pride. In recent years, the relationship between Iran and Iraq has gotten particularly close and has been elevated to a strategic relationship, leading some commentators and media outlets in Iran to make claims such as "Iraq and Baghdad are in our hands." These types of statements are perceived by many Iraqis as a source of humiliation, and encourage anti-Iranian powers, among them Saudi Arabia, in their efforts to incite against Iran, the commentary argued.

► The Chairman of the Iranian-Iraqi Joint Chamber of Commerce, Seyyed Hamid Hosseini, stated in an interview to the Iranian news portal, Khabar Online (November 4), that the ongoing protests in Iraq are not preventing ongoing export of goods from Iran to Iraq through the border crossings connecting the countries. He stated that the crossings in the Kurdistan region have not been shut down due to protests in Iraq, which is concentrated mainly in Baghdad and the southern region of the country. He mentioned that there is growing demand for Iranian goods in the region, due to a call to boycott Turkish goods by the Kurds following the Turkish invasion of northeastern Syria. The export of electricity and gas from Iran to Iraq was also not affected due to the protests, according to him.

Iranian Involvement in the Palestinian Arena

► Iran forcefully condemned the IDF's targeted killing of Bahaa' Abu al-'Ata, the Commander of the Northern Section of al-Quds Brigades, the military wing of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. The assassination led to a massive firing of rockets toward Israel.

► The Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abbas Mousavi, called the assassination "a terrorist attack" and called to prosecute "the occupiers of Palestine" in international tribunals as war criminals. Mousavi praised the "resistance" of the Palestine people, and said that unity and resistance are the only option of the Palestinian people to confront the "Zionist occupiers." He condemned the international community for apathy in the face of "the crimes and terrorist actions of the Zionist regime," which encourage it to continue carrying out crimes against the Palestinian people (ISNA, September 12).

► The Commander of the IRGC, Hossein Salami, also addressed the IDF action and declared that "the barbaric actions of the Zionists" are bringing them closer to their final end. He

asserted that the world of Islam is gradually losing its patience, and if “the Zionist regime” persists in its criminal behavior, it will set the groundwork for its demise. Salami emphasized that the Palestinian people always have the legitimate right to defend themselves against the crimes of “the Zionist regime.” (Fars, November 14).

► The media coverage in Iran of the latest round of escalation in the Gaza Strip highlighted the massive volleys of rockets fired at Israel.



**The Commander of the IRGC, Hossein Salami
(Fars, November 14, 2019)**

► In a speech before the attendees of the 33rd International Islamic Unity Conference, held on November 14 in Tehran, the Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, stated that for the past three decades, at the very least, the United States and “Zionist regime” have become the source of all war, killing and confrontation in the region. Rouhani emphasized? insisted that Palestine and Jerusalem are the most important issues for the Muslim world and that popular opinion in the Muslim world will not allow these issues to be forgotten.

► He added that Palestine must be liberated by the brave Muslims of the region and of Palestine, and that the Palestinians should return to their homeland. He reiterated Iran’s support for the Palestinians, adding that it must not be forgotten that Iran is the only Muslim country that turned the Israeli embassy in Tehran to the embassy of Palestine and that all liberation and resistance groups are supported by the Islamic Republic (Fars, November 14).

► The leader of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Yahya Sinwar, praised Iranian assistance to Hamas in a speech before Palestinian youth. In a speech, delivered on November 4, Sinwar stated that without Iran, Hamas would not have achieved what it has to date, and that unlike Arab countries that close their doors before Hamas, Iran is providing assistance to Hamas in the form of funds, materiel and knowledge (Fars, November 4).

► In recent months, senior Hamas officials have expressed their gratitude to Iran for its support to the organization on a number of occasions. In early September, the Head of Hamas' Political Bureau, Ismail Haniyeh, sent a letter to the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, thanking him for the welcome a Hamas delegation received in Tehran in late July, and for Khamenei's willingness to support Hamas (IRNA, September 1). In mid-September, a senior Hamas official in the Gaza Strip, Ismail Radwan, declared that Iran's support for Palestine is genuine and a matter of principle. In an interview to the news website al-Risala Net, Radwan stated that the visit conducted by a delegation of senior Hamas officials to Tehran was "strategic, unprecedented and extremely important," and highlighted the depth of strategic relations between Hamas and other "resistance" organization, led by Iran (IRNA, September 13, 2019). In early October, a member of Hamas' political Bureau, Khalil al-Hayya, stated in a press conference in Gaza that Iran and Hezbollah are the main supporters of the "resistance" in Palestine, adding that Hamas is proud of its relationship with them (IRNA, October 1, 2019). These statements reflect the bolstering of relations between Tehran and Hamas over the past year.