



Spotlight on Iran

June 14, 2020 - June 28, 2020

Overview

- ▶ An Iranian news website published an article discussing the changing patterns of activity of the Qods Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) following the assassination of Qasem Soleimani. According to the report, the Qods Force under Esmail Qa'ani shifted to a new phase characterized by greater secrecy, compared to Soleimani's era, but maintains its efforts to promote Iran's overarching interests in the various arenas.
- ▶ The Iranian news agency Tasnim reported that the Commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, Esmail Qa'ani, visited the Albu Kamal area on the Syrian side of the Syrian-Iraqi border.
- ▶ Following the entry into force of the Caesar Act, which tightened sanctions on Syria, Iran reiterated its commitment to maintain economic cooperation with Syria. The spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that Iran will not abide by the economic sanctions on Syria. In addition, the Iranian deputy minister of foreign affairs stated in a phone call with the incoming Syrian Prime Minister, Hussein Arnous, that Iran will not hesitate to take any step to assist Syria to deal with the American sanctions. Finally, the speaker of the Iranian Majlis stressed in a meeting with the Syrian ambassador to Tehran the deep ties between the two countries, and declared that Iran sees Syria as the "front line of the Resistance Axis." Meanwhile, a senior delegation of economic officials arrived in Damascus to discuss ways to bolster cooperation between the two countries in the spheres of trade, the economy, science and research.
- ▶ Iran is maintaining its efforts to preserve its interests in Iraq under the changing circumstances created following the appointment of Mustafa al-Kazimi as Iraq's Prime Minister. The major development in relations between the two countries over the past two weeks was the visit of the governor of Iran's Central Bank to Baghdad. During the visit, the Iranian official met with senior Iraqi officials who are concerned with the economy, and

discussed financial and banking cooperation between the two countries. The sides also discussed setting up a joint financial mechanism that would allow Iran to use the revenues it generates by selling gas and electricity to Iraq, for the purchase of basic goods, such as food and medicine. Meanwhile, the Iranian minister of oil met with his Iraqi counterpart, and the Iranian military attache in Baghdad met with the incoming Iraqi Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, Abdul Amir Rashid Yarallah.

► A mourning ceremony in memory of the former Secretary General of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Ramadan Shalah, who had died in early June, was held in Tehran. In a statement issued by the Commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, Esmail Qa'ani vowed to continue supporting the militant group until the fulfillment of the final goal of "liberating Palestine and Jerusalem."

The Qods Force under Qa'ani's Leadership

► An Iranian news website published an article discussing the shift in the patterns of activity of the IRGC's Qods Force following the assassination of Qasem Soleimani and appointment of Esmail Qa'ani as the commander of the force. The report stated that unlike his predecessor, Qa'ani prefers to carry out covert activities instead of overt ones, while seeking to continue to promote Iran's overarching goals in the various arenas. In Iraq, in the context of the appointment of the new Prime Minister, Mustafa al-Kazimi, Qa'ani is overseeing the execution of a semi-covert effort to bring about the setting of a date for the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq. In Yemen, the article credits Qa'ani for the latest achievements of the Houthis in the campaign against the forces backed by Saudi Arabia in recent weeks. In Syria, where Qa'ani increased his presence in recent months, significant developments are expected in the battlefield, which will impact Russia and Turkey. In Lebanon, Israel not only failed to halt the plans to bolster Hezbollah's military capabilities, but the plans have entered "the most dangerous stages for the Zionists," the author claimed. In the conclusion, the article states that the Qods Force under the command of Qa'ani has entered a new stage that is characterized by greater secrecy, which bolsters its capabilities against Iran's enemies in the region (Jahan News, June 20).



**Esmail Qa'ani, the Commander of the IRGC's Qods Force
(at the center of the image) (Jahan News, June 20, 2020)**

Iranian Involvement in Syria

► The news agency Tasnim reported (June 27) that in recent days, the Commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, Esmail Qa'ani, visited the Albu Kamal region in Deir Ezzor, eastern Syria, near the Iraqi-Syrian border. During his visit, Qa'ani declared that "the schemes of the United States and the Zionist regime" have not ended.



**Esmail Qa'ani during his visit to Albu Kamal
(Tasnim, June 27, 2020)**

► On June 15, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohammad Javad Zarif, visited Turkey and met with his Turkish counterpart, Mevlüt Cavuşoğlu, and discussed bilateral relations and regional developments. In the joint press conference of the ministers of foreign affairs, Zarif stated that Tehran intends to soon host a virtual meeting of representatives of the Astana process concerning the settlement of the war in Syria (IRNA, June 15). At the end of his visit to Ankara, Zarif traveled for a visit in Moscow.

► The Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abbas Mousavi, condemned the imposition of American sanctions on Syria as part of the Caesar Act, declaring that Iran will

not abide by them. He stated that implementing the law is a form of “economic terrorism” against Syria’s citizens, and is contrary to international law and human rights, stressing that Iran intends to preserve and bolster its economic relations with Syria (Tasnim, June 18).

► On June 18, the First Deputy of the Iranian President, Eshaq Jahangiri, spoke on the phone with the incoming Syrian Prime Minister, Hussein Arnous, and congratulated him for assuming his position. Jahangiri underlined Iran’s support for Syria, stating that Soleimani’s assassination has not resulted in any change to Iran’s policy toward Syria and the “resistance front.” He called for quickly implementing the agreements signed in recent years concerning expanding economic cooperation between the two countries, adding that Iran will not hesitate to take all and any steps to reduce Syria’s burden and facilitate coping with the pressures and sanctions imposed by the United States (Fars, June 18).

► On June 22, the Speaker of the Iranian Majlis, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, met with the Syria Ambassador to Tehran, Adnan Mahmoud. Ghalibaf condemned the sanctions imposed by the United States under the Caesar Act, claiming that the reason for imposing economic sanctions is the failure of the enemies in the military campaign against Syria. He highlighted the deep ties between Iran and Syria, stating that Iran has always seen Syria as the front line of the “resistance front.” Ghalibaf also remarked that Qasem Soleimani played a unique role in Syria, but his successor, Esmail Qa’ani is continuing in his path (Tasnim, June 22).



**The meeting between the chairman of the Majlis with the Syrian ambassador to Tehran
(Tasnim, June 22, 2020)**

► In mid-June, a delegation focusing on economic matters headed by Hassan Danaeifar, the Chairman of the Committee for Promoting Economic Ties with Syria and Iraq, and an Adviser to the Iranian Vice President, arrived for a visit in Damascus. During the visit, the members of the delegation met with the Syrian Minister of Trade and Consumer Protection, Talal al-

Barazi, and with the Syrian Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Bassam Ibrahim. The sides discussed ways to bolster the cooperation between the two countries in the spheres of trade, the economy, science and research (IRNA, June 17).



The meeting between the Iranian economic delegation and the Syrian Minister of Science (IRNA, June 17, 2020)

► The Iranian news agency Fars reported (June 15) that the representative of the Supreme Leader of Iran in Syria, Ayatollah Seyyed Abolfazl Tabatabaei was able to achieve reconciliation between the two Syrian tribes, the Naim and Shammar, in the Shabaa' region in the Damascus countryside after a blood feud was materialized between the two sides about a decade ago.



The representative of the Supreme Leader of Iran in Syria (Fars, June 15, 2020)

Iranian Involvement in Iraq

► The Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad, Iraj Masjedi, stated in an interview to the TV channel al-Iraqiya, that the visit of the Commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, Esmail Qa'ani in Baghdad in early June was not related to the start of the strategic dialogue between the United States and Iraq, but was intended to bolster ties between Iran and Iraq. According to him, the American-Iraqi dialogue is a domestic political matter in Iraq, and if the Iraqi parliament supports the decisions of the government, Iran will back them as well. He

stressed, however, that Iran believes that the American forces should withdraw not just from Iraq, but from the entire region.

► Masjedi also stated that Iran wishes to support and cooperate in all spheres with the government of Mustafa al-Kazimi, and bolster bilateral relations between the two countries. He expressed hope for bolstering of economic and trade ties between the two countries, and particularly in the electricity sector, adding that Iran is willing to invest in increasing Iraq's capacity to produce electricity. He remarked that although there is a difference between the government led by Kazimi and previous Iraqi government, the two countries need each other, and therefore no change has occurred in the relationship between the neighboring nations, and there are no fundamental disagreements between the two countries. He added that Iran is interested in maintaining good relations with all Islamic and Arab countries, and that those countries should maintain ties with it based on their own interests and not those of the United States and the Zionists (ISNA, June 15).

► In mid-June, the Governor of the Iranian Central Bank, Abdolnaser Hemmati, paid a visit to Baghdad, during which he met with the Governor of the Iraqi Central Bank, Ali Mohsen Ismail al-Alaq, and discussed expanding monetary and banking cooperation between the two countries, and setting up a joint financial mechanism, which would allow Iran to use its revenues from exports to Iraq, mostly of gas and electricity, to import basic goods from Iraq that are not under sanctions, including medicine and foodstuffs. Last year, an agreement was signed between the Iranian and Iraqi central banks concerning bolstering cooperation between the two (IRNA, June 17).



**The meeting between the central bank governors of Iran and Iraq
(IRNA, June 17, 2020)**

- ▶ During his visit to Baghdad, the Governor of the Iranian Central Bank also met with the Iraqi Minister of Economy, Ali Allawi, and with the Iraqi Prime Minister, Mustafa al-Kazimi, who expressed hope that the economic sanctions placed on Iran will be lifted. Kazimi stated that Iraq stands by Iran and is ready to assist it, given the hard conditions it faces, similarly to how Iran previously stood by Iraq. At the end of his meeting with the Iranian central bank governor and with the Iraqi minister of electricity, Hemmati stated that Iraq expressed its willingness to pay back Iran the sums it owes for imports of electricity and gas (IRNA, June 17).
- ▶ On June 21, the Iranian Minister of Oil, Bijan Namdar Zangeneh spoke on the phone with his Iraqi counterpart, Ihsan Abdul Jabbar, and discussed ways to promote cooperation between the two countries in the petrochemical sector (Tasnim, June 21).
- ▶ Last week, the Iranian Military Attache to Baghdad, Mostafa Moradian, met with the incoming Iraqi Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, Abdul Amir Yarallah, and discussed the military cooperation between the two countries and the campaign against ISIS. Moradian expressed his country's willingness to assist Iraq's armed forces in various spheres. The Iraqi chief of staff expressed the desire to expand and bolster intelligence sharing as part of the joint committee of Iran, Russia, Syria and Iraq, which was established for the purpose of intelligence sharing and coordinating the campaign against ISIS (IRNA, June 23).



**The meeting between the Iraqi chief of staff and the Iranian military attache to Baghdad
(IRNA, June 23, 2020)**

Iranian Involvement in the Palestinian Arena

- ▶ On June 20, a ceremony marking the death of the former Secretary General of Palestinians Islamic Jihad, Ramadan Shalah, was held in Iran. He had died in early June. In a statement issued by the Commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, Esmail Qa'ani, he proclaimed that the Force will continue to stand by the "Palestinian resistance." Qa'ani praised Shalah for the struggle he waged against the "Zionist regime," and vowed to continue supporting the

Palestinian Islamic Jihad until the realization of the final goal of liberating Palestine and Jerusalem. This support will continue to the path of the former Qods Force Commander, Qasem Soleimani, who was assassinated in January 2020, the letter concluded (Tasnim, June 20).



**The ceremony commemorating Shalah's death in Tehran
(The website of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting Authority, June 20, 2020)**

► On June 24, the Speaker of the Majlis, Mohammad Baqer Ghalibaf, met with the Palestinian Ambassador to Tehran, Salah al-Zawawi, and declared that the question of Palestine is not only a political one, but an Islamic one and that Iran's support for Palestine is a basic principle of Iran's policy. He claimed that the "Zionist regime" is facing an internal crisis and is crumbling from within. The Palestinian ambassador to Tehran stated in the meeting that Israel's elimination is guaranteed (Tasnim, June 24).



**The meeting between the speaker of the Majlis and the Palestinian ambassador to Iran
(The official website of the Majlis, June 24, 2020)**