



Spotlight on Iran

July 26, 2020 - August 9, 2020

Overview

- ▶ On the night between August 2-3, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) fired on a cell that attempted to place improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in an Israeli-controlled enclave on the eastern side of the border fence separating Syria and Israel. The IDF assesses that the attempt was carried out by a local cell operated by Iran, likely as a response to a series of airstrikes on Iranian targets in Syria, which have been attributed to Israel.
- ▶ Military sources in the city of Daraa in southern Syria reported that Russian Military Police and Syrian forces loyal to Russia have recently applied pressures that led to a reduction in the presence of pro-Iranian militias in the region, and in the nearby Quneitra governorate, bordering Israel. This report follows prior reporting on growing Russian efforts to entrench their hold over southern Syria.
- ▶ Iran issued a statement of condemnation following reports that an American energy company, the Delta Crescent Energy, signed a deal to export oil with the Kurdish-led autonomous administration of north east Syria. The spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs labeled the deal “a grave violation of Syria’s national sovereignty and territorial integrity.”
- ▶ Senior Iranian officials expressed solidarity with the Lebanese people following the Beirut Port explosion, and expressed willingness to assist Lebanon. The day after the disaster, Iran began dispatching special assistance flights to Beirut carrying medical equipment, medical personnel, humanitarian assistance, food and medicine.
- ▶ The Adviser of International Affairs to the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali-Akbar Velayati, labeled the meeting of the Iraqi prime minister with the supreme leader during his July 21st visit to Tehran as one of the most extraordinary meetings that Supreme Leader Khamenei has held. Meanwhile, talks continue between political and military Iranian and Iraqi officials. The Iranian military attache to Baghdad met with the Iraqi minister of the interior and discussed ways to facilitate movement between the two countries in light of the COVID-19 outbreak, while the Iranian ambassador to Baghdad met with the Iraqi national security adviser.

Iranian Involvement in Syria

- ▶ On the night of August 2-3, the IDF struck a cell that attempted to place IEDs in an enclave under Israeli control on the eastern side of the border fence between Syria and Israel. According to the IDF, the cell included four members who were apparently killed in the incident. The IDF spokesman assessed that the cell was a local one, operated by Iran and not Hezbollah, and it is possible that the attack was attempted as retaliation for a series of airstrikes hitting Iranian targets in Syria in recent weeks, which have been attributed to Israel.
- ▶ The al-Arabiya channel reported (July 30), based on military sources in the city of Daraa in southern Syria, that the Russian Military Police and the forces of the Syrian Army's Fifth Corps, which is loyal to Russia, have recently applied pressure that resulted in a reduction in the presence of Iranian-backed forces in the city and its countryside, as well as in the Quneitra governorate, which borders on Israel. According to this report, the Russian forces prevented pro-Iranian forces from establishing themselves in new locations, and placed checkpoints to prevent the concentration of these forces in one place. This report joins a series of prior reports about growing Russian efforts to entrench its grip over southern Syria, in part by bolstering the Fifth Corps of the Syrian Army, as part of the power struggle Russia is waging against Iran for spheres of influence in the war-torn country.
- ▶ The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement of condemnation following reports that an American energy company, Delta Crescent Energy, signed a deal to export oil with the Kurdish-led autonomous administration of north and east Syria. According to the report, the agreement was signed with the full knowledge of the U.S. administration and without receiving any authorization from the Syrian regime. The spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abbas Mousavi, called the agreement "a grave violation of Syrian's national sovereignty and territorial integrity," and claimed that this is an illegal and invalid decision by a "force occupying Syrian land" and is a further step in stealing Syria's natural resources (Tasnim, August 4).
- ▶ Iran expressed solidarity with the Lebanese people following the explosion in Beirut and expressed its willingness to assist Lebanon. The Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, sent a message of condolences to the Lebanese President, Michel Aoun, and expressed sorrow about the great tragedy in the Port of Beirut, and expressed willingness to offer humanitarian assistance and medical equipment for those injured. The Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs,

Mohammad Javad Zarif, spoke on the phone with his Lebanese colleague, Charbel Wehbe, and expressed his condolences to the victims of the disaster, adding that Iran is willing to offer all the assistance Lebanon requires, including immediate needs, and particularly humanitarian support (Tasnim, August 5). The Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), Hossein Salami, also expressed his condolences to the Lebanese people and offered the assistance of the IRGC to Lebanon (Tasnim, August 5).

► The Iranian embassy in Beirut announced that following the explosion in Beirut, Iran began dispatching special assistance flights to Beirut, carrying medical assistance, medical personnel, humanitarian aid, food and medicine from the Iranian Red Crescent (ISNA, August 5).



**A flight with aid from the Iranian Red Crescent to Lebanon
(Mehr, August 5, 2020).**

Iranian Involvement in Iraq

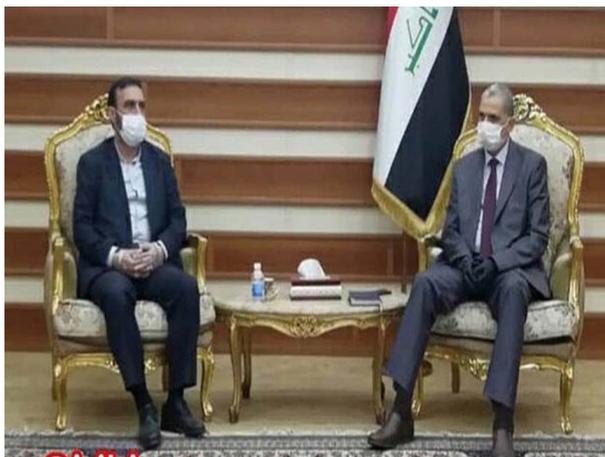
► Ali-Akbar Velayati, the Adviser on International Affairs of the Supreme Leader of Iran, described the meeting of the Iraqi Prime Minister, Mustafa al-Kazimi, with the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, during his July 21st visit to Tehran, as one of the most extraordinary meetings the leader has held. Velayati, who was present at the meeting, stated that since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, Khamenei has avoided meeting foreign guests, but due to the gravity of the meeting with the prime minister of Iraq, and the special importance of Iran-Iraq ties, in the Leader's view, he decided to hold the meeting despite the public health measures. Velayati reported that al-Kazimi treated Khamenei with great respect, referring to him as "leader" (qa'ed in Arabic). He stressed that Iran does not meddle

in Iraqi domestic affairs, and that the resolution passed by the Iraqi parliament, demanding the withdrawal of American forces from Iraq, reflects the will of the Iraqi people. Velayati discussed the relationship between Iran and Iraq, stating that there are only a few nations that have such historic, religious and cultural ties, and that the relationship between the two nations has gotten deeper due to the joint sacrifice of Iranian and Iraqi youth in the campaign against ISIS. Addressing the threat made by Khamenei to avenge the death of Qasem Soleimani, Velayati stated that Iran's determination to avenge the death of the former commander of the IRGC's Qods Force marks the start of a strategic process that will lead to positive developments in the future of the region. This process will entail the nations of the region gaining control over their destiny. He remarked that Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and the "resistance front" will be the ones deciding their future and the fate of the region, without interference from the Americans, who will pay the price for the crimes they have committed. Velayati praised the Shia militias in Iraq, defining them as "a blessing for the Iraqi people" (ABNA, July 29).



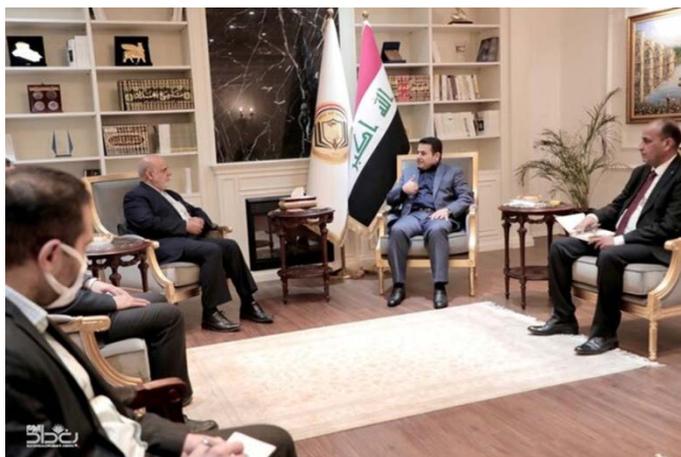
The meeting between the supreme leader of Iran and the Iraqi prime minister (ABNA, July 29, 2020).

► On July 27, the Iranian Military Attache to Baghdad, Mostafa Moradian, met with the Iraqi Minister of Interior, Othman al-Ghanami. The two discussed the movement restrictions between the two countries due to the COVID-19 outbreak, and ways to facilitate the movement of goods and commercial activity in the border crossings connecting the two countries. In the meeting, the Iraqi minister of interior expressed his country's willingness to expand ties with Iran and use Iran's technological capacities to fight organized crime, drug trafficking and terrorism (ISNA, July 27).



The meeting between the Iranian military attache to Baghdad with the Iraqi minister of interior (Mehr, July 27, 2020).

► In parallel, the Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad, Iraj Masjedi, met with Qasim al-Araji, the Iraqi National Security Adviser. The two discussed the need to maintain cooperation between the two countries (Mehr, July 27).



The meeting between the Iranian ambassador to Baghdad with the Iraqi national security adviser (Mehr, July 27, 2020).

► On July 31, the President of Iran, Hassan Rouhani, spoke on the phone with the Iraqi President, Barham Salih, on the occasion of Eid al-Adha, and remarked that the last visit of the Iraqi Prime Minister, Mustafa al-Kazimi, to Tehran was positive, and provided opportunities to discuss the issues facing both countries. He expressed hope that the decisions and the agreement, which were reached between senior officials in both countries, will be realized as soon as possible, and will facilitate the expansion of economic and trade ties between Iran and Iraq. The president of Iraq thanked Rouhani for the Iranian assistance in coping with the COVID-19 pandemic, and stressed the need to maintain cooperation and implement the agreements signed between the two countries (Fars, July 31).

► On the occasion of Eid al-Adha, President Rouhani also spoke on the phone with the Iraqi Prime Minister, Mustafa al-Kazimi. Rouhani stated that al-Kazimi's visit to Tehran last month and the agreements reached during it will promote the expansion of ties between the two countries. The Iraqi prime minister mentioned that after his visit to Iran, he ordered the establishment of committees chaired by ministers of his government to implement the agreements and join projects, which were concluded during the visit. He stressed that Iraq wishes to remove all the barriers and challenges standing in the way of expanding ties with Iran, and commence laying down the railroad track between the two countries as soon as possible (Fars, August 1).

► The manager of the Iranian customs directorate in the Ilam province in western Iran, Ruhollah Gholami, reported that about 400 trucks of goods cross from Iran to Iraq through the Mehran border crossing, representing a sharp drop compared to last year. He mentioned that over the past year, over 107,000 trucks passed through the Mehran international border crossing, but due to COVID-19-related restrictive measures imposed by Iraqi authorities on import of certain types of goods from Iran, the border crossing is open only twice per week, and the volume of trade has been significantly reduced. He added that most of the Iran exports to Iraq through the Mehran border crossings include agricultural products, plastic product, metal, steel, mechanical equipment, car spare parts, ceramics, construction material and glass. The Mehran border crossing in Ilam province is considered the central border crossing for the movement of private cars, trucks carrying goods and movement of religious pilgrims between Iran and Iraq (IRNA, August 4).