



# Spotlight on Iran

August 23, 2020 - September 6, 2020

## Overview

- ▶ **The deliberations concerning the settlement of the war in Syria have resumed as part of the ongoing Astana Process:** a delegation headed by the senior adviser to the Iranian minister of foreign affairs, which visited Damascus in mid-August, met in Geneva with the Turkish deputy foreign minister, and with the special representative of the Russian president to Syria. The delegation stressed Iran's support for the ongoing constitutional committee process, and the need to find a political solution in Syria that would preserve the country's sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity.
- ▶ In late August, the Iranian deputy of the minister of defense and executive director of the organization for social security of the armed forces of Iran visited Syria. He met with the Syrian minister of public works and housing and discussed facilitating the implementation of the memorandum of understanding, signed in late 2019, concerning the construction of thousands of housing units in Syria by Iranian companies. According to the Syrian minister of housing, the talks focused on Iran's role in building the housing project, which will entail the construction of 8,000 housing units, as well as Iranian investments in real-estate in Syria.
- ▶ **The visit of the Iraqi prime minister to Washington, as part of the strategic dialogue between Iraq and the United States, aroused criticism in Tehran.** The Editor of the Kayhan Daily, Hossein Shariatmadari, criticized a statement attributed to the Iraqi Prime Minister, al-Kazimi, made during his visit, according to which Iraq needs the United States as part of the ongoing campaign against ISIS. In an editorial published by Kayhan, Shariatmadari argued that **al-Kazimi's statement contravenes the desires of the Iraqi people, adding that Iran regards American presence in Iraq as a security threat.**
- ▶ Meanwhile, the Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad, Iraj Masjedi, stated in an interview that Iran does not intend to interfere in Iraq's foreign relations. He also expressed, however, concern about the continuation of U.S. military presence in Iraq, and expressed hope for the

rapid withdrawal of American forces from the country. In addition, Masjedi discussed Iranian investments in Iraq, stating that Tehran wishes to complete laying down the railway track from Iran to Iraq, thus connecting northern Iran to the beaches of the Mediterranean in Syria through Iraq.

► **The Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, lambasted the normalization deal reached between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel, calling it “a betrayal of the Muslim world, the Arab world, the countries of the region and Palestine.”** He accused the UAE of treachery and collaboration with Israel and the United States against the Palestinian people.

## Iranian Involvement in Syria

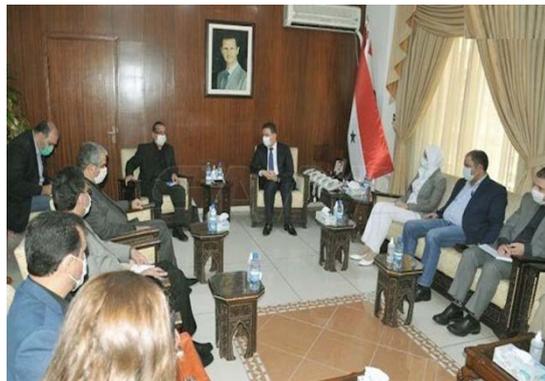
► As part of the ongoing Astana Process, a delegation headed by the Senior Adviser to the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ali-Ashgar Khaji, met in Geneva separately with the Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister, Sedat Önal, and with the Special Representative of the Russian President to Syria, Alexander Lavrentiev. Khaji stressed Iran’s support for the work of the Syrian Constitutional Committee, without foreign interference, and for maintaining the cooperation between the three countries participating in the Astana Process. He also highlighted the importance of reaching a political solution for Syria that will respect its national sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the country (ISNA, August 24). On August 17, Khaji met with the Syrian president and Syrian minister of foreign affairs in Damascus and discussed the ongoing coordination between the three guarantor states of the Astana Process.



**The meeting between the Iranian delegation headed by the adviser to the Iranian minister of foreign affairs with the Turkish delegation headed by the deputy foreign minister (Mehr, August 24, 2020).**

► On August 24, the Iranian Deputy Minister of Defense and Executive Director of the Social Security Organization of the Iranian Armed Forces, Ebrahim Mahmoudzadeh, met in

Damascus with the Syrian Minister of Public Works and Housing, Suhail Abd al-Latif, and discussed the construction by Iran of affordable housing units in Syria. Mahmoudzadeh remarked that Iran is willing to cooperate with Syria in its reconstruction process, utilizing advanced technologies of high quality but low cost. He called for expanding cooperation between Iran and the public and private sectors in Syria, and implementing development projects. He added that Iran's activity will launch in Damascus and later expand to other governorates. The Syrian minister of housing reported that during its visit to Damascus, the Iranian delegation will hold technical discussions with senior officials in the Organization for Development and Real-Estate Investments and the Syrian Construction Association. He added that the talks are focusing on Iranian participation in carrying out a construction project, which would entail the establishment of 8,000 housing units, as well as investments in the real-estate sector (Tabanak, August 25).



**The meeting of the delegation led by the Iranian deputy minister of defense with the Syrian minister of housing (Tabanak, August 25, 2020).**

► In late 2019, Iran and Syria signed a bilateral memorandum of understanding concerning regional development, which included an agreement regarding constructing 30,000 housing units in Syria by Iranian companies. The implementation of the memorandum of understanding has been delayed, possibly due to the COVID-19 outbreak, in addition to financial and bureaucratic challenges.

## Iranian Involvement in Iraq

► The visit of the Iraqi Prime Minister, Mustafa al-Kazimi, to Washington and his meeting with President Trump as part of the strategic dialogue between Iraq and the United States have aroused criticism in Iran. In an editorial of the Kayhan newspaper (August 21), the Editor of the daily, Hossein Shariatmadari, claimed that the citizens of Iraq, including Shia and Sunni, saw Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis as epitomes of the struggle against ISIS

and as men who rescued them from the snares of terrorism. At the same time, Iraqis have no doubt that ISIS was created and supported by the United States and its allies. The Iraqi parliament demanded the withdrawal of American forces from Iraq and the Shia militias have declared their intention to continue fighting the United States. Therefore, the statement attributed to al-Kazimi made during his visit to Washington, according to which Iraq is in need of the United States in the ongoing campaign against ISIS, is contrary to the wishes of the Iraqi people. Iraq's matters have to do with Iraq alone, the commentary argued, and as the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, declared recently at his meeting with al-Kazimi, Iran has not meddled in these affairs and will not meddle in them. However, there is a link between Iran's security and that of its neighbors, and similar to how Iran did not hesitate to act to remove the menace of ISIS threatening Iraq, it sees the invitation of the godfather of ISIS [the United States] into Iraq, as a threat to the security of both Iraq and Iran, and demands that the Iraqi prime minister speak in a manner that will reflect the [wishes of the] Iraqi people.

► In an interview to the news website al-Monitor (August 28), against the backdrop of al-Kazimi's visit to Washington, the Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad, Iraj Masjedi, stated that Iran has no intention to interfere in Iraq's foreign relations and that Iraq's leadership is well-aware of the country's national interests, better than anyone else. At the same time, he expressed concern about the continuing military presence of the United States in Iraq, stating that Iran believes that this presence led to greater instability and the rise of terrorism. He expressed concern that this presence will lead to the emergence of "new colonialist mechanisms." According to him, Iran supports Iraq without any preconditions, whether Iraq allows the American forces to remain on its soil, or decides to remove them. In the same breath, Masjedi expressed hope that the decision of the Iraqi parliament to remove the American forces from Iraq will be implemented as soon as possible. He accused the US forces of turning Iraq into a battlefield with Iran by assassination of the Commander of the Qods Force, Qasem Soleimani. Masjedi denied any Iranian involvement in decision-making processes in Iraq, or the activities of armed and political forces in Iraq. Addressing Iran-Iraq ties, Masjedi stated that the relationship between the two countries involved a wide variety of economic, cultural and educational and even humanitarian aid, and that Iran has been exporting electricity to Iraq for over a decade, established the largest power plant in Rumaila in the southern province of Basra, a football stadium in Baghdad and provided various forms

of aid to Iraq during the coronavirus pandemic. He expressed hope that the border disputes between the two nations get resolved soon so that the project of connecting Iran's railway to Iraq's could be quickly completed and revive the silk road connecting northern Iran to the Mediterranean sea in Syria through Iraq. Addressing Iraq's willingness to connect its electricity grid to the Gulf states, the ambassador said Iran has no objection to Iraq expanding its relationships with the Arab world; however, he said no other country can provide Iraq with the same quality of electricity as Iran.

► The Iranian consulate in Soleimaniyya in Iraqi Kurdistan officially announced the resumption of Mahan Air flights from Tehran to Soleimaniyya, starting Sunday, August 30, following a six-months freeze due to the COVID-19 outbreak. According to the statement of the consulate, the company will operate one flight per week (ISNA, August 28). In mid-August, the company Mahan Air announced its intention to resume flights to five destination in Iraq: Baghdad, Najaf, Basara, Erbil and Soleimaniyya.



**The announcement of the Iranian consulate in Soleimaniyya concerning the resumption of flights from Tehran to the Iraqi city**

## Iranian Involvement in the Palestinian Arena

► The Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, forcefully assailed the normalization deal struck between the UAE and Israel, labeling it “a betrayal of the Muslim world, the Arab world, the countries of the region and Palestine.” He insisted that this treachery will not last for long, but the shame of the deal will be recorded in posterity. Khamenei blamed the UAE for opening the region to the Zionists and forgetting the Palestinian question. He expressed regret that while the Palestinian people are placed under immense pressure from all directions, the Emirates are collaborating with the “Zionist regime” and with “criminal

American elements” including “that Jew in the Trump family” [Jared Kushner, the son-in-law and senior adviser to President Trump] against the interests of the Muslim world and the region. Khamenei expressed hope that the UAE will soon realize the harm they have done and will make up for their mistake (Fars, September 1).



**“The dangerous consequences of the UAE’s normalization agreement; Resistance is the only alternative to struggling against the conspiracies” (Tasnim, September 1, 2020).**