



Spotlight on Iran

October 18, 2020 - November 1, 2020



Overview

- ▶ The new Iranian trade center was officially inaugurated in Damascus. The center, towering 12-stories tall, is intended to provide services to companies and business-people, and hold trade shows aiming to increase the trade volume between Iran and Syria. Meanwhile, the Iranian ambassador to Damascus met with the Syrian minister for internal trade and the Syrian minister of the economy, and discussed the possibility of conducting barter trade between the two countries, which would include goods whose imports and exports are banned due to the economic sanctions imposed on both countries.
- ▶ The Representative of the Iranian Supreme Leader to Syria, Abolfazl Tabatabaei Ashkezari, completed his tenure in Syria and was replaced by Hamid Saffar Harandi.
- ▶ The U.S. Treasury Department announced the imposition of sanctions on the Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, Iraj Masjedi. In addition to this, the U.S. placed sanctions on five Iranian entities for illegal meddling in the U.S. elections and Iranian oil-related entities for their economic support for the activities of the Qods Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Force (IRGC). In response to the U.S. imposition of sanctions on the Iranian ambassador to Baghdad, Iran announced placing sanctions on the American ambassador to Baghdad and two additional American diplomats stationed in Iraq.
- ▶ In late October, the secretary general of the Iraqi Shia pro-Iranian militia, Harakat al-Nujabaa', visited Tehran and met with senior Iranian officials, including the senior adviser of the supreme leader on international affairs, the senior military adviser of the supreme leader, and the deputy commander of the IRGC. His meetings in Tehran focused on the U.S. military presence in Iraq.
- ▶ Iran appointed - for the first time after five years - Hassan Eyrolou, its new ambassador to Yemen. Eyrlou, who likely operated in the ranks of the IRGC's Qods Force, was involved in the late 1990s in training Lebanese Hezbollah operatives in Iran. According to Iranian media reports, Eyrlou held the Yemen file in the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in recent years.

► The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs harshly condemned Sudan after it had announced the normalization of relations with Israel. The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement declared that the agreement between Sudan and Israel was achieved through a ransom, which was given to Sudan in the form of removing it from the list of state-sponsors of terrorism.

Iranian Involvement in Syria

► The Head of the Joint Iranian-Syria Chamber of Commerce, Kivan Kashefi, provided an update with regards to the Iranian Trade Center, which was inaugurated in Damascus. He reported that the center stretches over an area of 4,000 square meters in the Damascus foreign trade area, and is housed in a 12-story building. Two of the floors are intended to be used for trade shows, and the other floors will be used to provide marketing, transportation, legal consulting, banking and insurance services. The center enables communicating with the chambers of trade, industry and agriculture in various cities throughout Syria. According to Kashefi, 24 Iranian firms have already started operating in the center and are providing services in various sectors. He mentioned that the center's purpose is to expand trade ties between Iran and Syria, and raise the extent of economic ties between the private sectors in both countries. Kashefi expressed hoped that Iranian exports to Syria will increase to \$1 billion by the end of 2021 (ILNA, October 18).

► Fahad Darwish, the Deputy Chairman of the Joint Syrian-Iranian Chamber of Commerce, updated that the Syrian Minister for Internal Trade, Talal al-Barazi, and the Syrian Minister of Economy, Samer al-Khalil, recently met with the Iranian Ambassador to Damascus, Javad Torkabadi, and discussed the possibility of conducting barter trade between the two countries in goods that are banned for export and import, due to international sanctions. According to Darwish, the members of the joint chamber of commerce are set to meet with the Syrian minister of economy to discuss the offer (Eqtesad.net, October 18).

► Hojjat-ul-Islam Hamid Saffar Harandi replaced Ayatollah Abolfazl Tabatabaei Ashkezari as the representative of the supreme leader in Syria. The ceremony marking the substitution was held in Damascus, in the presence of the Iranian Ambassador to Syria, Javad Torkabadi, senior clerics and representatives of the Syrian and Iranian governments. During the ceremony, Saffar Harandi called for bolstering the unity and brotherhood between the Syrian

and Iranian people, and thanked the departing representative of the supreme leader for his service in Syria (Fars, October 25).



The ceremony marking the replacement of the representative of the supreme leader of Iran to Syria (HawzahNews.ir, October 25, 2020)

► On October 28, the Head of the Iranian Judiciary Branch, Ebrahim Ra’isi, met with the Syrian Ambassador to Tehran, Adnan Mahmoud, on the occasion of the end of the term of the ambassador in Iran. Ra’isi praised Syria’s strong stance against Israel, the United States and the “terror groups,” and harshly condemned the sanctions placed on Syria and Iran, labeling them “a crime against humanity.” He stressed that the “economic warfare” has not been successful in altering Iran’s path, or stopping the Syrian government and people, adding that the schemes of the enemies only strengthened the “resistance axis.” Addressing the normalization agreements concluded between Israel and a number of Arab countries, Ra’isi stated that every agreement that strives to ensure Israel’s existence is bound to fail, and that the people of the region, and particularly the people of Syria, Lebanon and Iran, have a central role in accelerating the disappearance of the “fake regime that is Israel.” He added that the “strategy of resistance” is the best and most effective strategy, and that through active resistance, it will be possible to liberate not only the Golan Heights, but all occupied territories. The departing Syrian Ambassador thanked the leadership of the Iranian regime for their support to expanding ties between the two countries, to the struggle against terrorism, and “foiling the plots of imperialism in the region” (ISNA, October 28).

► On October 20, the Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon, Mohammad Jalal Firouznia, met with the Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Charbel Wehbe, and discussed bilateral relations, developments in Lebanon and the region, and Iranian assistance to reconstructing the areas damaged by the blast in the Beirut Port in August 2020. Firouznia stated that the deep cultural, political and economic ties between Iran and Lebanon can not be severed. He

stressed that Iran has always stood by the people and government of Lebanon, and that the Resistance is a common, unique and eternal denominator of the two countries. Firouznia added that Iran is willing to cooperate with Lebanon in the military sphere as well. The Iranian minister of foreign affairs remarked that Lebanon always welcomes the expansion of ties between the two countries (the website of the Iranian Broadcasting Authority, October 20).



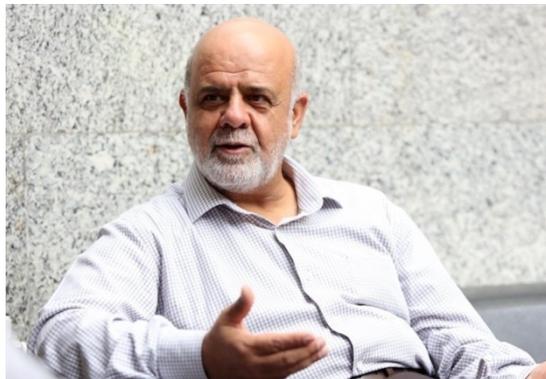
The meeting between the Iranian ambassador to Beirut with the Lebanese minister of foreign affairs (Tasnim, October 20, 2020)

Iranian Involvement in Iraq and Yemen

► The U.S. Treasury Department announced (October 22) placing sanctions on the Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad, Iraj Masjedi. In addition, the U.S. placed sanctions on five additional Iranian entities for meddling in the U.S. 2020 elections. In a tweet on his Twitter account (October 23), the American Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, wrote that the IRGC's Qods Force continues to exploit Iraq to further its interests at the expense of the Iraqi people. He accused the Iranian ambassador to Baghdad of oversees the operations of the Qods Force for many years, thus jeopardizing Iraq's stability. Meanwhile, the United States also announced imposition of sanctions on the Iranian Ministry of Petroleum, the National Iranian Oil Company and the National Iranian Tanker Company due to their financial support for the activities of the Qods Force.

► In response to the statement of the American administration, Ambassador Masjedi declared that he was delighted to hear he has been included in the American sanctions list, and that the American step hardened his resolve to advance the goals of the Islamic Republic and of the people of his country, and proved the legitimacy of his actions. He added that the IRGC and Qods Force are a source of pride for all those yearning for freedom and fighters of jihad,

and that there is no doubt that the “axis of Islamic resistance” will continue its struggle against “the terrorist American regime and the occupier Israel” with the full support of the Islamic Republic, until victory is achieved (Tasnim, October 23).



**The Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad, Iraj Masjedi
(Tasnim, October 23, 2020)**

► In response to the imposition of American sanctions, Iran announced its decision to place sanctions on the American Ambassador to Baghdad, Matthew Tuller. The Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Saeed Khatibzadeh, stated that Tuller, his deputy and the American consul in Erbil in northern Iraq were placed under sanctions due to their involvement in the assassination of the Commander of the IRGC’s Qods Force, Qasem Soleimani, in January 2020, and their role in imposition of sanctions on the Iranian people (ISNA, October 23).

► An Iranian delegation headed by the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister of Legal and International Affairs, Mohsen Baharvand, met in Tehran with an Iraqi delegation headed by the Iraqi Deputy Foreign Minister, Abdul Karim Hashem, and discussed issues related to the border and cooperation in the railway sector. The discussions were intended to facilitate the agreement, signed between the two countries in 2018, concerning the completion of laying down a railway from Khoramshahr in southwestern Iran to Basra in southern Iraq (Tasnim, October 22).



**The deliberations between the Iranian and Iraqi delegation in Tehran
(Tasnim, October 22, 2020)**

► On October 22, the Iranian General Consul in Karbala, Seyyed Mojtaba Karimi, met with the head of secretary general's office of the Shia Iraqi militia, Harakat al-Nujabaa. According to the statement of the militia, the two discussed the importance of cultural, societal and media activities, as part of a “soft power” campaign (Telegram channel of Harakat al-Nujabaa, October 22).



**The meeting of the Iranian consul to Karbala with the representative of Harakat al-Nujabaa
(Telegram channel of the militia, October 22, 2020)**

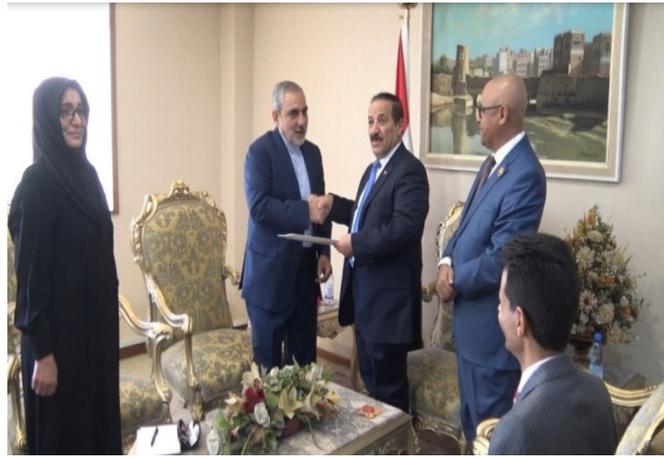
► In late October, the Secretary General of the Shia militia Harakat al-Nujabaa, Akram al-Kaabi, arrived for a visit in Tehran and met with senior Iranian officials. The Senior Adviser to the Supreme Leader of Iran on International Affairs, Ali-Akbar Velayati, claimed in his meeting with al-Kaabi that Iraq is the most powerful Arab country, and this is why the United States and Zionism seek to meddle in it. He asserted that the Americans have no choice but to withdraw from Iraq, since this is the desire of the Iraqi people. Velayati mentioned what he claims are American efforts to partition Iraq between the Shia, Sunnis and Kurds, and proclaimed that the future of Iraq is in the hands of the citizens of Iraq, and particularly the brave youth and fighters of the Shia militias (the Telegram channel of Harakat al-Nujabaa,

October 27). In addition, al-Kaabi met with the Senior Military Adviser of the Supreme Leader of Iran, Yahya Rahim Safavi, and discussed security, political and economic developments in the region, as well as the U.S. presence in Iraq. Al-Kaabi stated in the meeting that the American embassy in Iraq is not a diplomatic headquarters, but a military base and the source of problems in Iraq. He added that Washington strives to create economic and security crises in Iraq to lead it to destruction and insecurity. In the meeting, Safavi called for expanding ties between the two countries, and asserted that the United States is interested in the severing of ties between Iran and Iraq, and replacing them with ties with Jordan, Saudi Arabia and even Israel. He argued that the presence of the United States anywhere in the world led only to insecurity, instability and terrorism, and that Iraq is a prime example of this (IRNA, October 27). During his visit to Tehran, al-Kaabi also met with the Deputy Commander of the IRGC, Ali Fadavi. During the meeting, the Iranian commander declared that the Americans only understand the language of force (shafaqna, October 27).



Akram al-Kaabi's meeting with the senior military adviser to the supreme leader of Iran (Mehr, October 27, 2020)

► For the first time in five years, Iran appointed Hassan Eyrolu as its new ambassador to Yemen. Source in Yemen claimed that Eyrolu was moved to Yemen using an Omani jet, which arrived from Muscat to Sanaa and transferred dozens of wounded Houthi fighters for medical treatment (The Arab Weekly, October 19). On October 27, the new ambassador submitted his credentials to the Yemeni Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hisham Sharaf (al-Wifaq News, October 27).



The Iranian ambassador presents his credential to the Yemeni minister of foreign affairs (Tasnim, October 27, 2020)

► Prior to his appointment as ambassador, Eyrolu served for five years as the deputy on Yemen affairs of the special adviser to the Iranian minister of foreign affairs (al-alam, October 27). Previously, Eyrolu operated in the ranks of the Qods Force of the IRGC. During the 2006 Lebanon War, two Hezbollah militants who were captured by the IDF, reported that they underwent training in 1999 by IRGC operatives in camps in the city of Karaj. According to one of the captured fighters, the commander overseeing training in using anti-tank missiles, was a senior Iranian trainer named Hassan Eyrolu.¹ His brother, Hossein Eyrolu, was killed in 1984 during the Iran-Iraq War.

Iranian Involvement in the Palestinian Arena

► The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs lambasted the decision of Israel and Sudan to normalize relations. A tweet on the Twitter account of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (October 24) stated that “Pay enough ransom, close your eyes on [sic] the crimes against Palestinians, then you’ll be taken off the so-called “terrorism” blacklist.”



¹ See the report of the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, “Hezbollah as a Strategic Arm of the Iranian Regime,” dated September 8, 2006 https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/Data/pdf/PDF_06_267_2.pdf