



Spotlight on Iran

June 24, 2021 – July 8, 2021

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Overview

- ▶ The President of Syria, Bashar al-Assad, spoke on the phone with Iranian President-Elect, Ebrahim Raisi, and wished him success in his role. The two stressed the need to bolster cooperation between the two countries and to maintain coordination between them.
- ▶ In light of the ongoing confrontation between the United States and Shia militias along the Syria-Iraq border, the commander of Aerospace Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), condemned the American presence in the region. He claimed that the Americans strive to partition Iraq and Syria to take over the energy resources in the region, and that only Iran is capable of thwarting this plot. Meanwhile, the speaker of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, lambasted the American strikes against targets linked to the Shia militias along the Syria-Iraq border.
- ▶ The Iranian embassy in Beirut issued a statement insisting that the arrival of oil tankers from Iran to Lebanon does not require approval by the United States. The statement was issued in response to a remark made by the American ambassador to Beirut, who addressed the possibility of supplying oil from Iran to Lebanon. This followed a statement by the Secretary General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, that his organization completed the necessary preparations for the import of oil from Iran, in light of the severe shortage of fuel in Lebanon.
- ▶ The Prime Minister of Iraq, Mustafa al-Kazimi, announced that he intends to visit Iran following the formation of the government of the incoming President, Ebrahim Raisi.
- ▶ In a TV interview, the former head of Hamas' Politburo, Khaled Mashal, confirmed once again that Iran provides Hamas with weaponry and technology. He added, however, that Hamas is interested in also improving its ties with Saudi Arabia.

Iranian Involvement in Syria and Lebanon

- ▶ On July 5, the President of Syria, Bashar al-Assad, spoke on the phone with Iranian President-Elect, Ebrahim Raisi. Assad congratulated Raisi for his election victory and wished

him success in his new role. The two leaders stressed the need to expand cooperation between the two countries in all spheres, and maintain coordination and talks between them (Fars, July 5).

► On June 28, Ali-Asghar Khaji, the Senior Adviser to the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, arrived for a visit in Damascus and met with senior Syrian government officials, chief among them, President Bashar al-Assad, and Foreign Minister Faysal al-Miqdad. During his meeting with President Assad, Khaji stressed Iran's ongoing support for Syria, and President Assad expressed his appreciation for this support. The two discussed recent developments in Syria and the international arena, and the ongoing talks concerning the settlement of the war in Syria, as well as bilateral relations (Fars, June 28).

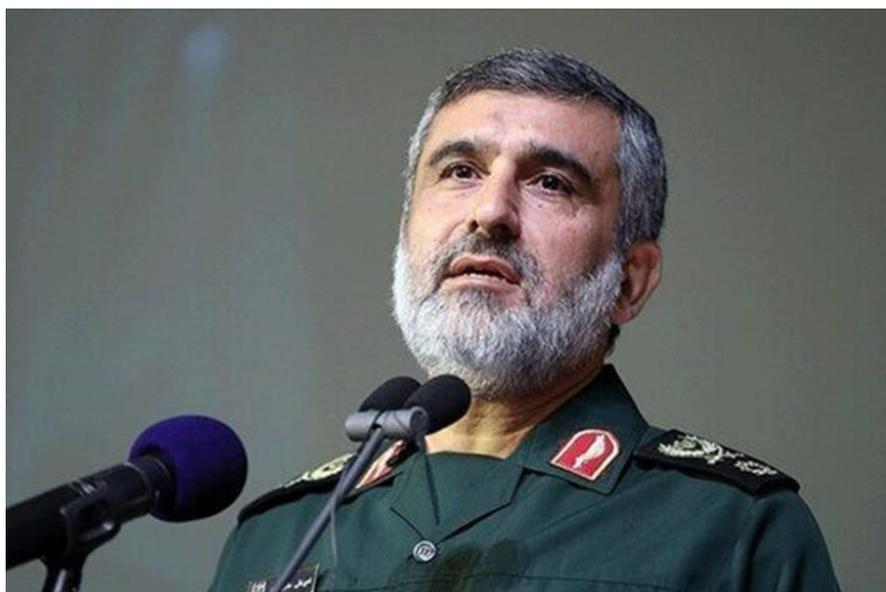


The meeting between President Assad and the senior adviser to the Iranian minister of foreign affairs. (Fars, June 28)

► The Iranian Aviation Organization announced that Syria made an official request for cooperation between the two countries in the aviation sector. In a meeting held between the leadership of the Syrian Aviation Organization with the Head of the Iranian Civilian Aviation Organization Touraj Dehqani Zanganeh, the request was made to forge technological cooperation between the two countries, as well as hosting Iranian instructors in Syria to provide training to Syrian flight controllers, technicians, operational crews and technical inspectors (IRNA, June 30).

► Amir-Ali Hajizadeh, the Commander of the IRGC's Aerospace Force, lambasted, yet again, the American military presence in the Middle East. In a speech he delivered in the city of Qom during a memory commemorating one of the IRGC fighters killed in Syria, Hajizadeh stated

that the problem of the Middle East has not been solved after the elimination of ISIS, because the Americans are still striving to take over the region. He compared ISIS to the Coronavirus, stating that just like COVID-19 started in a small place in China and spread throughout the world and reach the United States, so did ISIS, which was manufactured in American think-tanks, to spread it across the Muslim world. He added that unlike COVID-19, from which no country was safe, Iran managed to protect itself against the danger of ISIS owing to the sagacity of the Iranian Supreme Leader, and the quick actions of Qasem Soleimani and the fighters of the IRGC, who rose in the face of the terrorist group and prevented it from spreading into Iran itself. Hajizadeh claimed that the Americans are still plotting to partition Syria, Iraq and other countries in the Middle East, and take over the oil and gas deposits of the region, but they failed to achieve their plan, thanks to Iran's intervention. No one invited the Americans to Syria, he added, and yet they are still maintaining a military presence in the east of the country (IRNA, July 2).



The commander of the IRGC's Aerospace Force. (IRNA, July 2)

► A statement issued by the Iranian embassy to Beirut on Twitter (June 26) insisted that the arrival of Iranian oil tankers to Beirut does not require the approval of the American embassy in Lebanon, which should not be interfering in the “brotherly relationship” between Iran and Lebanon. The statement was issued in response to remarks made by the American ambassador concerning the possibility of Iran supplying oil to Lebanon. Meanwhile, The Secretary General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, repeated his promise to ensure the supply of fuel oil from Iran to Lebanon. In a speech delivered on June 25, Nasrallah stated that his organization completed all the administrative and logistical preparations for the import of

fuel from Iran, in light of the failure of the Lebanese government to provide a solution to the severe gasoline shortages in the country. (Nahar Net, June 25).

Iranian Involvement in Iraq

► On June 24, the Iraqi Prime Minister, Mustafa al-Kazimi, announced that he is set to travel to Tehran following the formation of the incoming government of President-Elect Ebrahim Raisi. Al-Kazimi declared that Iran has solid ties with the incoming Iranian president (Tasnim, June 24). Prior to this, the newspaper al-Sharq al-Awsat reported (June 24), according to a senior Iraqi source, that al-Kazimi intends to set clear red lines, which will differentiate between legitimate Iranian activities and “dangerous activities” carried out by pro-Iranian militias in Iraq.

► The Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Saeed Khatibzadeh, condemned the American strike carried out between the night of June 27th and 28th, against targets linked to Shia Iranian-backed militias. In his weekly press conference, Khatibzadeh declared that the American administration is persisting in its failed and wrong policies of the prior administration in the Middle East. He called on the American administration to amend its ways and instead of creating problems for the people of the region, allow them to determine their fate on their own, without American intervention. The spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the actions of the United States in the region harm regional security, and that one of the victims of this harm in the United States itself (ISNA, June 28).

► The news agency Shafaq News reported (July 6) that the Head of the IRGC’s Intelligence Organization, Hossein Taeb, arrived on July 5 for a secret visit in Baghdad. During the visit, Taeb met with commander of the Iraqi pro-Iranian militias and discussed the America strike on targets linked to the militias along the Syria-Iraq border. In addition, Taeb met with senior Iraqi officials and discussed the upcoming parliamentary elections in Iraq.

► The former Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, Hassan Danaeifar, argued in an interview to the Tasnim News Agency (June 28) that the American strike had a limited tactical impact, and warned that the United States will pay a heavy price for it. He remarked that the United States does not differentiate between attacks carried out as part of “legal resistance against occupiers” and the Popular Mobilization Units (al-Hashd al-Shaabi, the umbrella of the mostly Shia militias in Iraq). He reminded readers that the Hashd is a formal Iraqi military institution, and despite this, the United States attacks it from time to time. He added that

America's wrongheaded policies will accelerate the withdrawal of American forces from Iraq and the region as a whole.



The former Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, Hassan Danaeifar. (Tasnim, June 28)

► Meanwhile, the Iranian Ambassador to the UN, Majid Takht- Ravanchi, rejected the American accusations concerning Iranian involvement in the strikes against American-linked targets in Iraq. In a letter to the secretary general of the UN Security Council, Takht- Ravanchi claimed that Iran has never been involved, directly or indirectly, in any attacks against American individuals or facilities in Iraq, and that all accusations of Iranian involvement in the matter is wrong and lacks any basis. The Iran diplomat condemned the American strike against the targets of the Iraqi Shia militias along the Syria-Iraq border, which according to him, constitutes a violation of the sovereignty of two nations and the UN convention (Tasnim, July 3).

Iranian Involvement in the Palestinian Arena

► The incoming Iranian Ambassador to Damascus, Mehdi Sobhani, met with the heads of Palestinian factions in Damascus and discussed with them bolstering the coordination between the members of the “resistance front.” Addressing Iran’s policy concerning the Palestinian question following Ebrahim Raisi’s election, he remarked that Iran understands well the importance of the Palestinian issue for all Muslims (IranPress, July 2).



The meeting between the Iranian ambassador to Damascus with the heads of the Palestinian factions. (al-Ahed, July 2)

► The former head of Hamas' Politburo, Khaled Mashal, stated in an interview to the al-Arabiya TV station (July 4), that Iran provides weaponry and technical assistance to Hamas. He stressed, however, that Hamas is also interested in improving relations with Saudi Arabia.