



Spotlight on Iran

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Overview

- ▶ Hossein Amir-Abdollahian has assumed his new position as Iran's minister of foreign affairs. In the first days of his tenure, he paid visits to Syria and Iraq. During his visit to Baghdad, Abdollahian participated in a conference on regional cooperation, which was attended by the Iraqi prime minister and senior officials from several Middle Eastern countries, as well as the French president. Following his visit to Baghdad, during which he met with senior Iraqi government officials, the Iranian foreign minister traveled to Damascus. In the Syrian capital, he met with the Syrian president, Syrian minister of foreign affairs, as well as the representatives of Palestinian factions based in Damascus. In recent years, Abdollahian served as the adviser on international affairs to the chairman of the Majlis, and previously acted as deputy minister of foreign affairs on Arab and African affairs, as well as the ambassador to Bahrain and as a member in the Iranian negotiating team with the United States on the issue of Iraq. He is well-familiar with the Middle East, speaks Arabic, and is considered particularly close to the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and its Qods Force, and is supportive of Iran's expansionist policy in the region.
- ▶ The Syrian news website, Euphrates Post, reported that in recent days, the IRGC transferred a large number of rockets to pro-Iranian militias operating in Deir Ezzor, eastern Syria.
- ▶ The spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed the claim made by the Secretary General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, concerning the transfer of fuel shipments from Iran to Lebanon. In a speech he delivered on August 27, Nasrallah announced that his organization reached an agreement with Iran concerning the provision of at least three fuel shipments from Iran to Lebanon.
- ▶ Iranian activities in the economic sphere in Syria and Iraq: The chairman of the Joint Iranian-Syrian Chamber of Commerce announced that Iran intends to participate in a trade

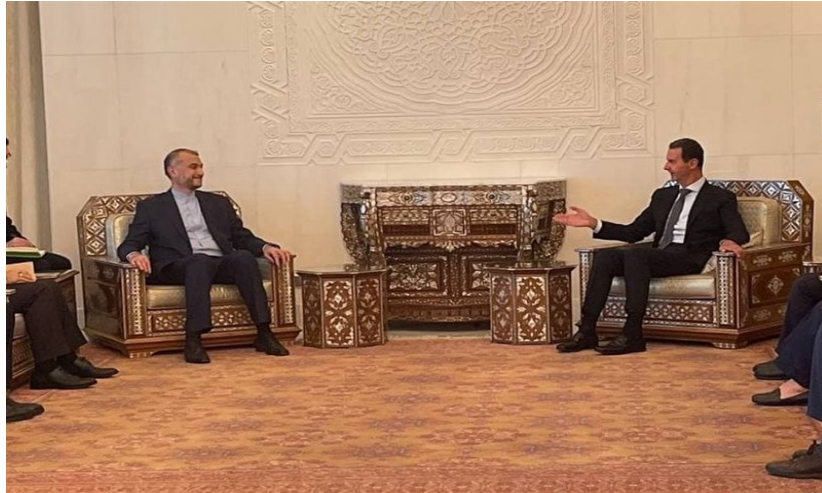
fair that will be held in the coming months in Damascus, during which Iranian products will be put on display. In addition to his, the chairman of the Joint Chamber of Commerce reported that Iranian and Syrian delegates are holding talks to increase the number of flights connecting Iran and Syria and promote financial transactions between the two countries. Meanwhile, the Iranian Organization for Trade Development reported a large increase in the volume of trade between Iran and Iraq in recent months.

Iranian Involvement in Syria and Lebanon

► The Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Faisal Mikdad, sent a congratulatory message to the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, after the Iranian Majlis confirmed the nomination of Abdollahian. Mikdad wished his counterpart success in his role and expressed hope for continued cooperation between the two countries to ensure Syria's and Iran's joint interests and to bolster their steadfastness in the face of Western pressure (Tasnim, August 26).

► On August 29, the Iranian minister of foreign affairs arrived for his first visit in Damascus after concluding a visit to Baghdad, during which he participated in a conference on regional cooperation. Abdollahian met with the Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad; with the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Faisal Mikdad; and with representatives of Palestinian factions in Damascus, including the representative of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and Fatah-Intifada. During his meeting with Mikdad, the Iranian foreign minister stated that the blood jointly spilled by Iranians and Syrians who fought in the war on terror is a strong guarantee for the continuation of a strategic relationship between the two countries. At the end of the meeting, the minister declared that the two countries are developing a plan to expand economic and trade cooperation to counter the sanctions imposed on the two regimes. He remarked that he also discussed the latest regional developments, and argued that any security of political arrangement in the region must include all countries of the region, including Syria. He added that the presence of foreign powers does not contribute to the stability and security of the region, and that the "Zionists" are a major cause for the instability of the region (Fars, August 29). In the meeting of Abdollahian with President Assad, the two discussed expanding cooperation between the two countries, particularly in the economic sphere, as well as regional and international developments, and especially the situation in

Afghanistan. The Iranian minister of foreign affairs updated President Assad about the discussions held as part of the Baghdad conference and stressed his country's unyielding support to Syria in the war on terror in all of its forms, and particularly "economic terrorism," his term for sanctions (Tasnim, August 29).



**The meeting between the Syrian president and the Iranian minister of foreign affairs.
(Tasnim, August 29)**

► On August 22, the Iranian Ambassador to Syria, Mehdi Sobhani, met with the Syrian Prime Minister, Hussein Arnous, and discussed ways to promote the agreements and joint projects Iran and Syria have agreed to implement, and how to further cooperation between the two countries. The two officials stressed the importance of cooperation in the sectors of industry, energy, investment, trade, ports, transportation, communications, agriculture, production of medicine, and additional spheres, and the need to accelerate the implementation of joint projects, as part of the two countries' efforts to counter the sanctions imposed on both regimes. The Syrian prime minister expressed his appreciation for Iran's support to Syria in the "war on terror" and stressed the need to facilitate joint protects of both countries in all spheres (ISNA, August 22).



The meeting held in Damascus between the Syrian prime minister and Iranian minister of foreign affairs. (ISNA, August 22)

► The Syrian pro-opposition website, Euphrates Post, reported (August 29) that in recent days, the IRGC transferred a large number of rockets to pro-Iranian militias operating in Deir Ezzor, eastern Syria. Among those militias are Kataeb Hezbollah, stationed in Albu Kamal city, the Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade located around al-Mayadin city, and the Iraqi Abu Fadl al-Abbas militia, which operates around the town of al-Quriya. According to his report, the weaponry was moved following a meeting between IRGC commanders, which was recently held in the city of Albu Kamal. The meeting's participants agreed to dispatch these weapons to the pro-Iranian militias in eastern Syria.

► Kivan Kashefi, the Chairman of the Joint Iranian-Syria Chamber of Commerce announced that in the coming month, Damascus will host a trade fair, during which Iranian products and capabilities will be on display. He remarked that the Syrian Ministry of Economy approved the plan to hold the fair, which will be organized by the Iranian-Syrian Joint Chamber of Trade in cooperation with the Iranian international exhibitions company. Kashefi added that the representatives of the two countries are holding talks to increase the number of flights between Iran and Syria, and on how to facilitate the ability to conduct financial transactions between the countries' banks and money changers, so as to expand the volume of trade between them. In addition, Syria and Iran are developing a long-term program to promote the participation of Iranian companies in the reconstruction of Syria. Kashefi updated that in the first four months of the current Persian year (March until July 2021), Iranian exports to Syria increased by 36 percent compared to the same period in 2020, with the volume of exports reaching 66 million dollars. He added that the goal is to reach 200 million dollars of trade until the end of the Persian year (ISNA, August 23).



Kivan Kashafi, the Chairman of the Joint Syrian-Iranian Chamber of Commerce. (ISNA, August 23)

► The Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Saeed Khatibzadeh, confirmed the announcement made by the Secretary General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, concerning the transfer of a fuel shipment from Iran to Lebanon. In his weekly press conference, Khatibzadeh stated that Iran provides fuel based on its own decisions and in line with the need to its friends. He proclaimed that Iran can not stand idly by and watch the Lebanese people suffer, and that it is willing to sell fuel not merely to Shia traders in Lebanon, but also to the Lebanese government (Fars, August 23). In a speech he delivered on August 22, Nasrallah reported that a tanker carrying fuel from Iran to Lebanon has set off, and that additional shipments are forthcoming. In another speech Nasrallah delivered on August 27, he declared that in recent days, Hezbollah reached an agreement concerning the dispatch of a third fuel tanker from Iran to Syria, adding that Lebanon requires more than three tankers to meet its needs. Nasrallah added in his speech that Iran has played a central role in the war on terror that Hezbollah has waged in Syria and Lebanon (Tasnim, August 27).

Iranian Involvement in Iraq

► On August 27, the Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs, Fuad Hussein, spoke on the phone with the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, and congratulated him on the occasion of assuming his position. The Iranian minister of foreign affairs stressed Iran's ongoing support to Iraq, and its willingness to deepen the relationship between the two countries. He also called for implementing cooperation agreements previously inked by leaders of both countries (ILNA, August 27).

► The Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, took part in a conference on regional cooperation, which was held on August 28 in Baghdad, upon the initiative of the

Iraqi Prime Minister, Mustafa al-Kazimi. The conference was also attended by the Jordanian king, the Egyptian president, the French President, Emanuel Macron, and representatives from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey and Qatar. Before his departure to Baghdad, Abdollahian stated that Iran supports any regional initiative of the government in Iraq. He added that Syria should have been invited to the conference as well, as an important neighbor of Iraq. He made sure to mention that Iran consults Syria's leadership concerning regional security and will hold direct discussions with it concerning any regional initiative (Tasnim, August 28). During his visit to Baghdad, Abdollahian met with senior Iraqi government officials, chief among them Iraq's Prime Minister, Mustafa al-Kazimi, and Iraqi President, Barham Salih (Fars, August 29).



The Iranian foreign minister during a visit to the monument honoring the slain Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in Baghdad. (Fars, August 28)

► The Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, Iraj Masjedi, conducted a visit to the work site at the shrine in al-Kazimiya in northern Baghdad, where laborers are expanding and renovating the pilgrimage site. The development works in the region, where the seventh and ninth Shia imams are buried, is being carried out by Iranian engineers working for the headquarters for the rehabilitation of Shia holy sites in Syria and Iraq (Sha News, August 22). In recent years, the organization has worked to expand and reconstruct Shia pilgrimage sites, a few of which have been damaged in the wars in Syria and Iraq.



**The Iranian ambassador to Iraq visits the al-Kazimiya shrine in northern Baghdad.
(Shia News, August 22)**

► The Iranian Organization for Trade Development reported a significant rise in the volume of trade between Iran and Iraq in recent months. According to the data of the organization, the value of Iranian exports to Iraq during the first four months of the Persian year (March until July 2021) has increased by 23 percent compared to the same period in 2020, reaching 2.817 billion dollars. Iraq is ranked second (after China, and ahead of the United Arab Emirates, Turkey and Afghanistan) among Iran's top export destinations. In parallel, a significant rise took place in the volume of Iraqi exports to Iran. The value of Iranian imports rose by 540 percent compared to the same period last year, reaching 140 million dollars (ISNA, August 25).