



Spotlight on Iran

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Overview

- ▶ Iran stressed once again its willingness to expand the assistance to Lebanon due to the severe economic crisis experienced by the country. The Iranian minister of foreign affairs said in a phone call with his Lebanese colleague that Iran is willing to supply fuel to the Lebanese government (and not merely Hezbollah), and the Iranian ambassador to Lebanon declared that his government offered to assist Lebanon in establishing electric power stations. Meanwhile, Hezbollah leader Nasrallah made it clear (September 13, 2021) that, contrary to the original plan, the Iranian tankers would not run out of fuel in Lebanon but in Syria, from where it would be transferred to Lebanon. This is to prevent Lebanon from being exposed to sanctions.
- ▶ On September 12, the Iraqi prime minister arrived for a visit to Tehran. This is his first official visit in Iran since the formation of the new government headed by President Ebrahim Raisi.
- ▶ The Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein-Amir Abdollahian, spoke on the phone with the head of Hamas' Politburo, who congratulated the Iranian official for assuming his position and thanked him for Tehran's support for the Palestinians. Abdollahian declared during the call that "resistance" is the only way to liberate Palestine and end the occupation.
- ▶ Against the backdrop of fighting that raged between the Taliban and forces resisting their rule in Panjshir Province, Iran called for solving the crisis through political negotiations, and for the inclusion of all ethnic and religious groups in the new government of the Islamic Emirate. The commander of the Qods Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) stated in a closed hearing of the Iranian Majlis that Tehran will adopt a policy toward Afghanistan based on its national and security interests and will not allow the United States to drag it into a confrontation with the Sunni world. Meanwhile, hardline Iranian media outlets affiliated with the military establishment expressed opposition to Iranian military intervention

in Afghanistan or support for the forces resisting the Taliban. Those outlets stressed that the circumstances in Afghanistan are completely different from other arenas such as Syria, Iraq and Yemen in which Iran intervened in recent years.

Iranian Involvement in Syria and Lebanon

► Omar Hussein al-Hassan, the Commander of the Imam al-Bakr Division, a pro-Iranian militia operating in eastern Syria, addressed in an interview to the Iranian Tasnim news agency the matter of Iranian support to the “resistance front” in Syria. He remarked that since the start of the crisis in Syria, Iran has played a central role in support the “resistance axis” through its military advisers, and particularly in the liberation of areas in eastern Syria. According to him “the Iranian brothers were first and foremost dependable supporters of the resistance in Syria and the war against ISIS and the armed terrorist groups, and later on against the American occupation army and the militias of the Syrian Democratic Forces” (the Kurdish-dominated U.S. partner force) (Tasnim, September 11).

► The Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Amir Abdollahian, spoke on the phone with the former Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jebran Basil, and stressed his country’s willingness to provide fuel to Lebanon. He stated that if the government and traders in Lebanon require fuel, Iran is willing to provide it. Abdollahian stressed Iran’s ongoing support to the government, the Army and the “resistance” in Lebanon. Basil congratulated Abdollahian for assuming the foreign minister position, and thanked Iran for providing fuel to his country. He also called for expanding ties between Iran and Lebanon (Tasnim, September 3). Prior to this, the Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Saeed Khatibzadeh, declared that Iran is willing to sell fuel not merely to Shia traders in Lebanon, but also to the Lebanese government (Fars, August 23).

► Meanwhile, Hezbollah leader Nasrallah made it clear (September 13, 2021) that, contrary to the original plan, the Iranian tankers would not run out of fuel in Lebanon but in Syria, from where it would be transferred to Lebanon. This is to prevent Lebanon from being exposed to sanctions. It should be noted that the plan for the supply of fuel and energy products to Lebanon, formulated by the United States, Syria, Egypt and Jordan, talks about the supply of fuel, gas and electricity from Egypt through Jordan and Syria. It should also be emphasized that

a new government has been formed in Lebanon in the meantime, headed by Najib Mikati, and it is not clear what its policy will be regarding the supply of fuel.

► The Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon, Mohammad Jalal Firouznia, declared that Iran is willing to establish an electric power station in Lebanon. In an interview to the Lebanese TV channel al-Manar, the ambassador reported that Iran offered Lebanon to assist it in establishing power stations but is yet to receive a response on the matter from the Lebanese government. He alleged that it appears that some actors are preventing the Lebanese government from accepting the Iranian offers, which is still standing. He added that it is Iran's duty to offer this and express willingness to assist Lebanon. Addressing the shipments of fuel from Iran to Lebanon, the ambassador asserted that the Americans and anyone else have no right to intervene in the transfer of fuel from Iran to Lebanon (Fars, September 3).



The Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon, Mohammad Jalal Firouznia.

Source: Fars, September 3

Iranian Involvement in Iraq

► On September 12, the Iraqi Prime Minister, Mustafa al-Kazimi, arrived for a visit in Tehran at the helm of a high-ranking delegation. This is al-Kazimi's first visit in Iran since the formation of the new government headed by President Ebrahim Raisi . During the meeting between the Iraqi prime minister and Iranian president, the two leaders discussed bolstering economic and trade ties between the countries, increasing the number of Iranian pilgrims to the Shia holy

sites during the Arbaeen ceremonies, and ending the visa requirement when traveling between the two countries (Fars, September 12).

► In an interview to Iranian TV (September 5), the former Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, Hassan Kazemi-Qomi, addressed the cooperation between Iran and the Shia militias in Iraq. He averred that if it were not for the actions of the militias, it would have been impossible to preserve the Iraqi system of governance, and succeed in the campaign against ISIS. Kazemi-Qomi stated that Iran shared with the Iraqi people and the Shia militias the experience it gained during the Iran-Iraq War, so that those lessons learned assist the Iraqi armed forces. Iran is proud of this cooperation, which was carried under the umbrella of the security cooperation agreements signed by the two countries, he added. He insisted that the Shia militias and “resistance” groups have played an important role in ensuring the stability and security of Iraq and that weakening them is a goal of the United States, which seeks instability and the formation of weak governments, so as to ensure its military presence in the country. He mentioned that Iran stood by the side of the Iraqi people to foil the American plots, and the failure of the American designs for the region started in Iraq (ISNA, September 6).

► On September 2, the Iranian Consul to Erbil, Nasrollah Rashnoudi, conducted a visit to Ninewa Province in northern Iraq, and declared that Iran is willing to take part in reconstructing the infrastructure in the city of Mosul. During the press conference he held with the Governor of Ninewa Province, Najm al-Jabouri, the Iranian consul stated that the war on terror brought about the destruction of the city, and that the extent of damage is too great for the local government to deal with on its own. He remarked that Iran is willing to assist in rebuilding the city, and that it has knowledge and experience in this sphere. Rashnoudi added that Iran is seeking to establish scientific, economic and cultural cooperation with Ninewa Province and is interested in hosting a special fair focused on reconstruction in the city of Mosul in which Iranian firms would participate. The Ninewa governor welcomed the offer of the Iranian consul concerning cooperation in the reconstruction of Mosul. He mentioned that the local government does not have the capacities required for reconstructing the city, and that the local government is willing to cooperate with all those willing to help accelerate the city’s post-war reconstruction (Fars, September 2).



The press conference of the Iranian consul general to Erbil together with the governor of Ninewa province. Source: Fars, September 2

- ▶ The Iraqi Supreme Health Committee, which gathered on September 5, with Prime Minister al-Kazimi at its helm, announced its agreement to allow over 30,000 Iranian pilgrims to participate in the Arbaeen ceremonies in Iraq (marking the 40th day of mourning for the Shia Imam, Hussein). The ceremonies are set to take place in Shia holy sites across Iraq at the end of September. The entry of Iranian pilgrims to Iraq will only be allowed through airports and will require presenting a negative PCR test result (determining the presence of the Coronavirus). The test must be taken no later than 72 hours prior to the flight (ISNA, September 5). On September 9, the Iraqi prime minister's office announced the doubling of the number of Iranian pilgrims who will be allowed to enter and participate in the ceremonies in Iraq (Fars, September 9).
- ▶ On September 8, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, spoke with his Iraqi counterpart, Fuad Hussein. The two discussed bilateral relations, regional developments, and the outcomes of the regional cooperation summer held in Baghdad in late August. Abdollahian asked the Iraqi foreign minister to increase the number of Iranian pilgrims allowed to enter Iraq to take part in the Arbaeen ceremonies (ISNA, September 8).
- ▶ On September 5, the Commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, Esmail Qa'ani, arrived to the city of Najaf to take part in the funeral of the senior Shia cleric, Ayatollah Sayyid Mohammed Saeed al-Hakeem, one of Iraq's senior Shia clerics, who passed away at the age of 85 (Fars, September 5).



The commander of the Qods Force in Najaf. Source: Fars, September 5

Iranian Involvement in the Palestinian Arena

► On September 4, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, spoke on the phone with the Head of Hamas' Politburo, Esmail Haniyeh. The Hamas leader congratulated the incoming Iranian foreign minister for assuming his position and thanked Iran for its support to the Palestinians. Abdollahian expressed his admiration for the Palestinian struggle against “the Zionist occupiers,” and declared that “resistance” is the only way to liberate Palestine and end the occupation. He stressed Iran’s support for the struggle of the Palestinian people and Iran’s desire to see the establishment of independent Palestinian rule over all of historic Palestine, with its capital as Jerusalem. He condemned the “crimes of the Zionists against the Palestinian women and children,” and added that Iran supports holding a referendum among the original (pre-1948) residents of Palestine to settle their fate (ISNA, September 4).

Iranian Involvement in Afghanistan

- In an interview to Iranian TV, the President of Iran, Ebrahim Raisi, called for holding elections in Afghanistan for the purpose of establishing a new government, which will be based on the votes and desires of the country’s citizens. He stressed that Iran wants peace and calm in Afghanistan, and supports any government elected by the country’s citizens (ISNA, September 4).
- During a Majlis hearing held on September 5, the Speaker of the Iranian Majlis, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, addressed developments in Afghanistan, stating that the Taliban’s ascent to power after 20 years of American occupation clearly demonstrates that Afghan politicians who

counted on the United States to bring progress and security to their country made a strategic mistake. He remarked that Iran supports protecting the religious and humanitarian rights of Afghanistan's citizens, without regard to race, religion, ethnicity, and wishes to see all of Afghanistan enjoy security and stability. He added that Iran will support the Afghan people in the face of any future efforts of foreign powers to destabilize the security and stability of the country (Tasnim, September 5). The Deputy Chairman of the Majlis' National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, Abbas Moqtadaei, also addressed developments in Afghanistan, stating that Iran held talks with various groups in the country and clarified to them that Tehran supports including all segments of society in the future Afghan government. He stressed that the talks Iran held with these groups do not represent meddling in Afghanistan's domestic affairs, and remarked that Tehran does not wish to weaken any of the forces operating in the country, but merely supports the inclusion of all groups in the government (ISNA, September 5).

► Meanwhile, on September 7, the Majlis held a closed meeting headed by the speaker of the body, to discuss developments in Afghanistan. The hearing was attended by the Commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, Esmail Qa'ani. During the hearing, Qa'ani addressed the American failure in Afghanistan, stating that Iran is closely following developments in Afghanistan, due to its national interests, and what matters to Iran is to ensure its national security is not harmed, and that the United States will fail to execute its plan to create a rift between Iran and the Sunni world. Qa'ani added that Iran cares a great deal about the fate of the Shia in Afghanistan, and that it seeks to reach a political solution to the conflict in the country, with all ethnic groups taking part in the governing of the country (Mashreqh News, September 7). On the same day, the Taliban announced for formation of a caretaker government, made up almost entirely of Pashtuns, without any representation for the country's Shia (Hazara) community (the Guardian, September 7).

► In light of the recent developments in Afghanistan, the Fars news agency, which is close to the IRGC, published a commentary that expressed apprehension about direct Iranian military involvement or provision of military support to the forces fighting against the Taliban in Panjshir Province. The commentary stated that the two sides currently fighting in the country do not represent the majority of Afghan citizens and that support for just one of them will only entangle Iran in a pointless campaign. The author argued that the situation in Afghanistan bares no similarity to the context in Palestine, Syria, Iraq or Yemen, where Iran has actively

intervened in the fighting and provided military support for armed actors there. Afghanistan is currently witnessing a domestic conflict without any foreign involvement, no group represents the majority of the population or all of them, the Afghan government has not made a formal request for Iranian assistance, and the Taliban itself is fighting ISIS and seeking to weaken it. In addition, even if Iran was to deploy the Afghan Fatemiyoun Brigade to the campaign against the Taliban, this will not yield any results, since the militia, which numbers less than 15,000 fighters, has no chance to beat the Taliban. Deploying the Brigade to Afghanistan will only enflame a sectarian war between Sunnis and the Shia. The commentary further argues that in Bahrain too, Iran avoided providing support to the Shia “revolutionaries,” even when the Bahraini regime quashed their protests, and did not provide them with weapons, but only offered political and media support. Iran should act in similar vein in Afghanistan, unless Pakistan intervenes militarily in the conflict, which will require a more forceful response by Iran toward both Pakistan and the Taliban, but such a response may also not entail direct military intervention (Fars, September 16).