



# Spotlight on Iran

October 7, 2021 – October 21, 2021

Author: Dr. Raz Zimmt



## Overview

- ▶ Iranian media outlets did not go beyond offering basic news reports concerning the assassination of Midhat al-Saleh, who was tasked by the Assad regime of managing the “Golan file.” Israeli sources assessed that his killing, attributed to Israel, disrupted a militant network in the Golan Heights overseen by Iran.
- ▶ In early October, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein-Amir Abdollahian, visited Syria and Lebanon. This is his second visit to Syria since assuming his position. During his visit to Lebanon, the Iranian minister offered senior Lebanese officials that Iran establish two power stations in Lebanon and will assist it in the reconstruction of the Beirut Port. Meanwhile, the Secretary General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, declared that his organization will continue importing fuel and diesel from Iran in the coming weeks.
- ▶ The spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the deadly clashes that erupted on October 14 in Beirut, and accused Israel of backing those who fired at Hezbollah and Amal supporters. The Shia partisans were protesting against the judge leading the investigation into the explosion that took place in the Beirut Port in 2020.
- ▶ Several Iranian media outlets voiced concern about the results of the parliamentary elections in Iraq. The results show a massive victory for the Sadrist current, led by the cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, while the Fatah Coalition, affiliated with Iranian-backed Shia militias, lost more than half its seats. According to a Western diplomat cited by Reuters, a delegation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) visited Baghdad after the elections to consult with the various parties represented in the Iraqi parliament.
- ▶ Iran began dispatching humanitarian assistance to those wounded in the suicide bombing on a Shia mosques in Kunduz and Kandadar, Afghanistan. Iran is also assisting the families of those killed in the attacks. Iranian officials condemned both attacks that took place in

Afghanistan in the past two weeks: in a Shia mosque in Kunduz (October 8) and a Shia mosque in Kandahar (October 15). Meanwhile, the President of Iran, Ebrahim Raisi, appointed Hassan Kazemi-Qomi, as his Envoy for Afghan Affairs. Kazemi-Qomi previously served as Iran's ambassador to Baghdad, and as Iran's consul in Herat in Afghanistan. He is known to be a former member of the Qods Force of the IRGC.

## Iranian Involvement in Syria and Lebanon

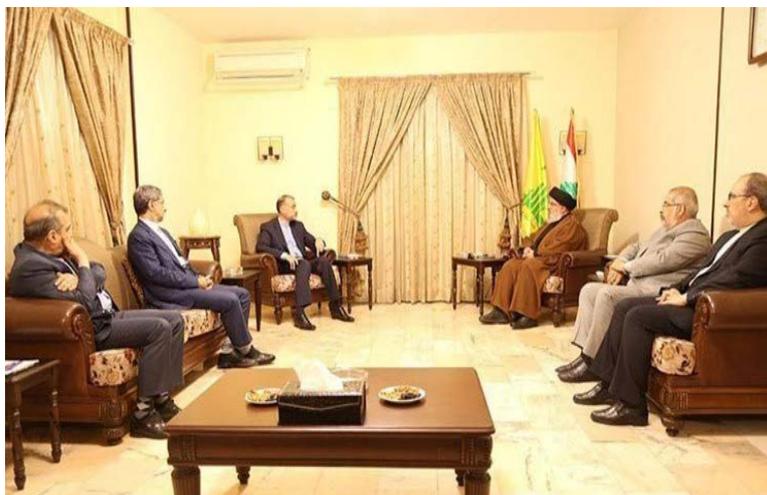
► Syria's state news agency reported (October 16) about an assassination carried out by Israel of Midhat al-Saleh, at a military outpost near Ayn a-Tina, which is located opposite the hometown of Majdal Shams, in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights. Al-Salah was a former security prisoner in Israel, a member of the Syrian parliament, and in charge of managing the "Golan file" by the Syrian regime. Israeli sources assessed that al-Salah served as the point of contact between the Syrian regime, Iran, Hezbollah and Iranian-backed militias operating in the Golan, and that his assassination disrupted a militant network overseen by Iran that is operating in the Golan Heights. Iranian media did not go beyond reporting the basic details of the event.



**Midhat al-Saleh. Source: Tasnim, August 16**

► On October 6, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein-Amir Abdollahian, arrived for a two-day visit to Lebanon. Upon arriving in Beirut, the minister stated that he will present to Lebanese officials new and improved offers of Iranian support to Lebanon and plans on breaking the "economic siege" he claims is imposed on Lebanon. He declared that Iran will continue to stand by its allies in the region in the struggle against "the Zionist regime" and

support Lebanon's independence, sovereignty and security (Fars, October 7). During his visit to Lebanon, Abdollahian met with the Lebanese President, Michel Aoun; Prime Minister Najib Miqati; the Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdallah Bou Habib; and with the Speaker of Parliament, Nabih Berri to whom he stressed Iran's support for Lebanon. The Iranian minister also met with the Secretary General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, and discussed with him developments in Lebanon and the region. Additionally, he met with representatives of Palestinian militant factions in Beirut. At a press conference after his meetings with the Lebanese president and prime minister, Abdollahian declared that Iran is willing to establish two power stations in Lebanon within 18 months: one of them in Beirut, and the other in south Lebanon. He also expressed Iranian willingness to assist in the reconstruction of the Beirut Port, which was damaged in a massive blast that took place in August 2020. In his meetings with the representatives of Palestinian factions, the Iranian minister of foreign affairs asserted that Iran will maintain its support for "the resistance" until the liberation of all of historical Palestine, Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa mosque (Tasnim, October 7). The Lebanese paper al-Akhbar reported (October 8) that the prime minister of Lebanon told the Iranian minister of foreign affairs that his country can not, for now, accept the Iranian offer of assistance, due to the American sanctions placed on Iran. In a speech he delivered in Beirut on October 11, the Secretary General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, called on the Lebanese government to respond to the offer of the Iranian foreign minister concerning the establishment of two Iranian power stations in Lebanon. He remarked that the Lebanese government ought to seriously consider the offer, and that his organization will continue to import fuel and diesel from Iran in the coming weeks (al-Mayadeen, October 11).



**The meeting between the secretary general of Hezbollah and the Iranian minister of foreign affairs. Source: Tasnim, October 8**

► After concluding his visit to Lebanon, Abdollahian traveled to Syria for his second visit in the country since assuming his position as foreign minister. During his visit to Damascus, he met with senior Syrian officials, chief among them President Bashar al-Assad, and discussed bilateral relations and regional and international developments. Upon arrival in Syria, Abdollahian stated that the relationship between the two countries is strategic, and that Iran is seeking to expand cooperation with Syria in all spheres and will support it, just as it has done during the war on terror (Tasnim, October 9).

► The Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Saeed Khatibzadeh, condemned the deadly clashes that erupted in Beirut on October 14, and accused Israel of supporting those who fired at Hezbollah supporters. Seven people were killed during clashes between the Lebanese Army and armed partisans of Hezbollah and the Shia Amal Party, who were protesting against the judge leading the investigation into the Beirut Port blast that took place in August 2020. The spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that Iran believes that the Lebanese people, government, army and “the resistance” will overcome the “incitement” backed by “the Zionist regime.” He called on Lebanese authorities to locate and detain those responsible for firing at the armed Shia partisans (IRNA, October 15).

## Iranian Involvement in Iraq

► The Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Saeed Khatibzadeh, welcomed the holding of parliamentary elections on October 10, and stressed Iran’s ongoing support to Iraq and its willingness to maintain this cooperation (ILNA, October 11). The Sadrist current, led by the cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, was the big winner of the elections. Sadr is a harsh critic of Iranian meddling in Iraq. His party won the largest number of seats and significantly increased his power in parliament (winning 73 seats compared to 54 in the current parliament). On the other hand, the Fath Coalition, headed by Hadi al-Ameri, and is affiliated with the Shia pro-Iranian militias, suffered a major blow, winning only 17 seats (compared to 48 in the current parliament). The former Iraqi Prime Minister and head of the State of Law Party, Nuri al-Maliki, who is close to Iran, increased his power in the parliament from 25 to 34 seats.

► BBC reporter Nafiseh Kohnavard reported (October 13) that a high-ranking Qods Force delegation arrived in Baghdad to hold negotiations between various Iraqi parties in an effort to assist the Fath Coalition and former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to form a coalition with

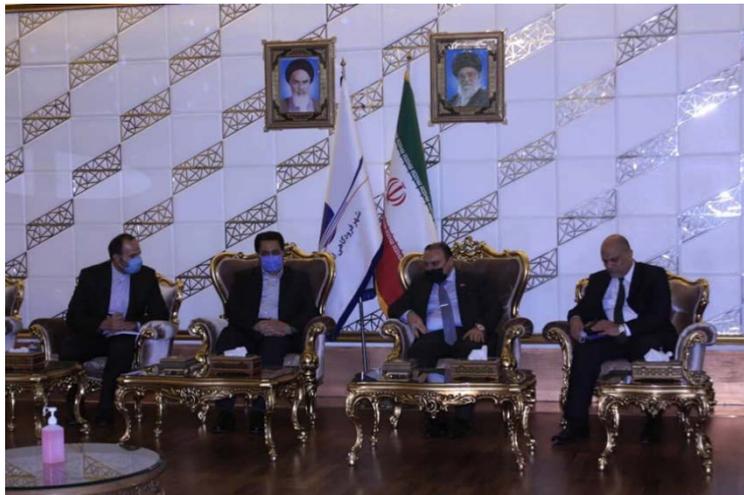
smaller parties, and add Kurdish and independent parliamentarians to form the largest bloc in parliament. The delegation was reportedly headed by Abdolreza Mesgarian, the Commander of the Ramadan Headquarters, which is responsible for the Qods Force's activities in the Iraqi arena. According to a Western diplomat cited in Reuters (October 12), Esmail Qa'ani was in Baghdad himself, meeting with the heads of different Shia parties in an effort to create the largest bloc and keep Tehran's allies in power. Meanwhile, an adviser to the Iraqi prime minister and the Iranian ambassador to Baghdad denied the report by the Iraqi Shafaq news agency (October 11) that the Commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, Esmail Qa'ani, arrived on October 11 in an unplanned visit to Baghdad, to coordinate between the Shia parties following the elections.

► The former Secretary General on Middle Eastern Affairs in the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qasem Moheballi, stated in an interview to the Iranian news website Entekhab (October 11) that the killing of Qasem Soleimani damaged Iran's standing in Iraq. He remarked that one of the challenges facing Iranian foreign policy-makers is that Iran's presence in the diplomatic arena is not significant, despite its sizeable presence in the military arena. Iran does not maintain ties with all the players in the region, such as the United States and Saudi Arabia, and this is exploited by its rivals to diminish its influence. Concerning the parliamentary elections in Iraq, Moheballi opined that the situation in Iraq is shifting rapidly, and it is hard to assess what will happen next and who will fill the vacuum, which will emerge after the United States withdraws or reduces its presence in Iraq. According to him, the situation in Iraq is complex, and observers should wait and see what coalition will emerge following the elections, and what will be the role will be played in the next government by the Kurds, Sunnis and the currents that opposed the al-Kazimi government. The former Iranian diplomat discussed the growing opposition of Iraqis to Iranian presence in their country, stating that the government of Mustafa al-Kazimi tried to preserve the ties with Iran, but also bolster the ties with other countries of the region and international powers, in an effort to prevent Iraq from becoming an arena where the powers of the region can settle their scores, for example, between Iran and Saudi Arabia and Turkey.

► Several Iranian media outlets expressed concern regarding the election results in Iraq. The editorial of the daily Ebtekar (October 13) argued that the election results in Iraq indicate that the political system in the neighboring country is undergoing change, and that the traditional politicians, who ignored that demands of the public, which were manifested in the waves of

protests in recent years, are losing strength. The editorial remarked that the elections are a warning message to Iran, which is forced to contend with instability affecting several of its neighbors and obligating Tehran to work to reduce tensions in its foreign relations. The commentator on international affairs, Hassan Hanizadeh, also argued that the parliamentary elections indicate that Iraqi voters are sick of the veteran political class and want change. In a commentary published by the reformist paper Arman-e Melli (October 13) Hanizadeh assessed that the next Iraqi parliament will post a challenge to the Iraqi currents who are close to Iran, and that in the future, a secular government may be elected in Iraq, which will act against the Popular Mobilization militias (which are backed by Iran).

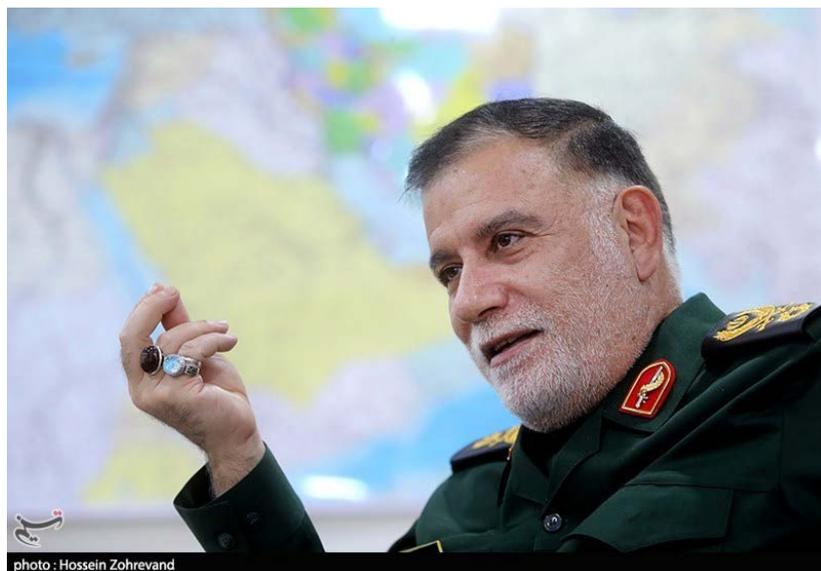
► On October 18, the Iraqi Minister of Justice, Salar Abdul Sattar Muhammad, arrived for a four-day visit in Tehran to discuss ways to bolster juridical ties between the two countries (IRNA. October 18).



**The Iraqi minister of justice during his visit to Tehran. Source: IRNA, October 18**

## Iranian Involvement in the Palestinian Arena

► The Deputy Commander of the IRGC for Operations, Abbas Nilforoushan, stated in an interview to the Tasnim news agency (October 12) that “the Zionist regime” is under “a full siege” by the Islamic Republic. He claimed that Israel’s efforts to gather intelligence on Iran under the cover of economic activities in countries bordering on Iran will fail. Nilforoushan added that “the Zionist regime” is in the midst of a process of collapse, and that its leaders have reached this realization and are trying to delay the inevitable. According to him, all the strategies and tactics Israel is using are focused on the effort to survive, but the time will come when the “Zionist regime” will collapse, without even the need to defeat it militarily.



**IRGC's deputy commander for operations. Source: Tasnim, October 12**

## Iranian Involvement in Afghanistan

► The Iranian embassy in Kabul announced dispatching humanitarian assistance to the wounded and families of those killed in the suicide bombing, carried out on October 8, in a Shia mosque in Kunduz, Afghanistan. In a statement made by the embassy it was reported that a plane carrying medicine and medical equipment departed on October 11 in the direction of Kunduz (ISNA, October 11). The Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), ISIS' branch in Afghanistan, claimed responsibility for the attack that killed dozens of worshippers. The Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, and the President of Iran, Ebrahim Raisi, condemned the attack and called on Afghan authorities to act against its perpetrators. President Raisi accused the United States of supporting ISKP (IRNA, October 9). Later on, the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the attack carried out on October 15 against a Shia mosque in the city of Kandahar, in which dozens of people were killed as well (ISNA, October 15).



**Humanitarian assistance from Iran sent to Kunduz. Source: Tasnim, October 12**

► The Iranian daily Jomhuri-ye Eslami, warned (October 9) that the humanitarian assistance Iran began providing to Afghanistan may end up in the hands of the Taliban instead of the civilians who need it. An editorial of the paper argued that providing Iranian humanitarian assistance to the citizens of Afghanistan is a correct and much-needed step, but that Iranian authorities must ensure the assistance reaches those in need. The paper argued that the takeover of the Taliban (which the paper labeled “a terrorist organization”) over Afghanistan created many problems for the citizens of the country, and deprived many of them, particularly members of the Shia minority (the Hazara) of their livelihood, and is even endangering their lives. In light of these developments, religion and morals obligate the people of Iran to assist Afghans, but information coming from Afghanistan indicates that the assistance is reaching the Taliban, whose members are using it as they please, and not handing it over to the needy. The paper suggested sending the Iranian assistance directly to the regions where the needy reside, for example through direct flights to the Bamyan region, which is located in a district where the Hazara people reside.

► Jalil Rahimi Jahanabadi, a member of the Majlis’ National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, stated that under the current conditions, Iran has no choice but to continue engaging with the Taliban government. He remarked that Iran has not encountered any unique problems with the Taliban since their takeover of Afghanistan, and that the free movement of goods and trade through the Dowqarun Border Crossing in northeastern Iran is continuing as normal. The Majlis member addressed the visit recently conducted by the Governor of Khorasan Razavi Province to Afghanistan, the first official visit of an Iranian representative to the country since the Taliban’s takeover, saying that the visit was necessary for improving trade ties between the two countries (Etemad, October 9).

►The Deputy Commander of the IRGC for Operations, Abbas Nilforoushan, stated in an interview to the Tasnim news agency (October 12) that there is a major difference between the Taliban of today and Taliban of the 2000s, but that it is too early to determine how the organization should be handled. He estimated that the Taliban reached the understanding that Afghanistan is made up of multiple and diverse ethnic and religious groups, and that those groups can not be ignored, and neither can the women of Afghanistan. He reported that maintaining border security, combatting drug trafficking and the living conditions of the citizens of Afghanistan are major concerns for Tehran, and that it is worth waiting to see to what an extent the Taliban's officially declared policy matches their policies on the ground. He added that the Taliban's ideology is completely different from ISIS' ideology, and that it is evident that since the Taliban took over Afghanistan, they have been combating ISIS.

►On October 17, the President of Iran, Ebrahim Raisi, appointed Hassan Kazemi-Qomi as his Envoy for Afghan Affairs (Tasnim, October 17). Kazemi-Qomi previously served as Iran's ambassador to Baghdad and as the Iranian consul in Herat, Afghanistan. He also previously served in the ranks of the IRGC's Qods Force.



**Hassan Qasemi-Qomi. Source: Tasnim, October 17**