



# Spotlight on Iran

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## Overview

- ▶ American officials assessed that Iran is behind the October 20<sup>th</sup> drone attack on the military base in al-Tanf, southern Syria, which serves the International Coalition led by the United States. According to Syrian sources, the attack on the base was a retaliation to recent strikes carried out in Syria, apparently by Israel.
- ▶ A Syrian opposition website reported the opening of five new offices of the pro-Iranian militia al-Hashemiyoun in the Deir Ezzor region. The expansion of the militia's work, which has been operating for some time in eastern Syria provides additional evidence to the growing Iranian reliance on local Syrian manpower to expand their influence in the country.
- ▶ The head of the Iranian Trade Development Organization announced that Iran and Syria will sign a free trade agreement between them at the end of November.
- ▶ The Iranian ambassador to Baghdad announced in late October that from now on, Iranian citizens will no longer require a visa when entering Iraq via airports. The visa requirement for Iraqi citizens visiting Iran has also been waived.
- ▶ On October 27, Tehran witnessed a summit of ministers of foreign affairs of the countries neighboring on Afghanistan as well as Russia. The spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced at the start of the summit that Iran opposes any foreign intervention in Afghanistan and that the purpose of the conference is to assist Afghan authorities to enact law and order, which will guarantee safety and stability in the country.
- ▶ The special envoy of the Iranian president on Afghan affairs met in Moscow with a delegation of the Taliban headed by the deputy prime minister of the interim government in Afghanistan. According to the statement of the Taliban's spokesman, the two discussed bilateral relations and decided to hold talks in the near future concerning trade, water and electricity. Concurrently, the Iranian ambassador in Kabul met with the foreign minister of

the Taliban government and discussed with him economic and trade cooperation between the two countries.

## Iranian Involvement in Syria

► American officials assessed that Iran is behind the October 20<sup>th</sup> drone attack on the base of the US-led Counter-ISIS Coalition in al-Tanf, on the tri border of Syria, Iraq and Jordan. The officials reported that the UAVs were not launched from Iranian territory, but Iran was the one who supplied the weaponry and encouraged its proxies to carry out the attack (Associated Press, October 26). The attack, which involved at least five armed drones, did not result in casualties. According to Syrian sources, the attack on the base in al-Tanf was retaliation for the attacks on Iranian targets in Syria carried out recently, apparently by Israel.

► A Syrian website affiliated with the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) reported that the pro-Iranian militia, the Hashemiyoun, which operates in eastern Syria, recently opened five new offices in the Deir Ezzor region to recruit local manpower and expand the activity of the militia and its influence. According to the report, the militia offers the new recruits a monthly salary of up to 300,000 Syrian lira (about 90 dollars). The website reported that the ceremony marking the opening the offices was held on October 25, in the presence of commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and local officials close to Iran. The new offices, operating under the central office of the militia in Deir Ezzor city, are named after fighters of the militia who have been killed in Syria (North Press Agency, October 25). Syria opposition sources reported in early 2021 on the establishment of the militia.



**Ceremony marking the opening of new offices of the Hashemiyoun militia in the Deir Ezzor region. (North Press Agency, October 25)**

►The Iranian Ambassador to Syria, Mehdi Sobhani, stated in an interview to the Syrian newspaper al-Watan (October 24) that Syria enjoys a special position in Iran’s foreign policy. He added that each of the two countries understands well the intensions of the other, and this serves as a solid foundation for advancing toward a bright future in their relationship. Sobhani remarked that his country is maintaining its efforts to advance economic cooperation with Syria and assist it in dealing with some of the problems it is facing, for example shortage of electricity, fuel and basic goods. He added that Iran sees favorably the recent rapprochement between Syria and some Arab countries. Addressing cooperation between Iran and Russia in Syria, the Iranian ambassador stated that the two countries share a joint goal, which is defeating terrorist and its international backers, who are striving to bring down the Syrian government and partition the country. He asserted that there is no agreement between Iran and Turkey concerning Syria, especially given the illegal presence of Turkey on Syrian land. He stated that Turkey must remove its forces from Syria.



**The Iranian ambassador to Syria. (al-Watan, October 24)**

►The Head of the Iranian Trade Development Organization, Alireza Payman Pak, announced that Iran and Syria will sign a free trade agreement between them in late November. He remarked that the agreement will be inked during the coming visit of the Iranian minister of industry and trade to Damascus, set to take place on November 29 (Mehr, October 25).

## Iranian Involvement in Iraq

►On October 21, the Adviser on International Affairs of the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Akbar Velayati, met with the former Iraqi Prime Minister, Adel Abdul Mahdi. During the meeting, Velayati stressed Iran’s support for the government of Iraq and the Iraqi people, and its willingness to assist its neighbor and cooperate with it. Abdul Mahdi congratulated Velayati,

who also serves as the Head of the Board of Governors of Azad University, a network of private universities and colleges, for the opening of a branch of the university in Iraq, and stressed that cooperation between the two countries will gradually expand to all spheres. The former Iraqi prime minister also pronounced that while Iran is gaining strength daily, the United States is weaker than ever before and ought to retreat from Iraq (IRNA, October 21).



**The meeting between the former Iraqi prime minister and the adviser on international affairs of the supreme leader of Iran. (IRNA, October 21)**

► The Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, Iraj Masjedi, announced that from now on, Iranian citizens will no longer require a visa to enter Iraq through airports. In a tweet on his Twitter account (October 25) Masjedi mentioned that Iranian citizens will be able to enter Iraq with a valid passport, and in line with medical protocols instituted to curb the spread of COVID-19. In addition, the ambassador announced that Iraqi citizens will be able to visit Iran without requiring a visa.

► On October 31, the Iranian Minister of Tourism, Ali-Asghar Shalbfian met with the Iranian Consul General in Karbala in Iraq, Mojtaba Shasti-Karimi, and discussed with him expanding tourism between Iran and Iraq beyond religious and medical tourism (ISNA, October 31).

## Iranian Involvement in Afghanistan

► On October 27, a summit was held in Tehran of the foreign ministers of the countries neighboring on Afghanistan. The foreign ministers of Iran, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Pakistan attended the conference in person, and the foreign ministers of Russia and China participated virtually. The Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Saeed Khatibzadeh, stated during the opening night of the conference that it is intended to assist Afghanistan to reach a solution of peace of stability. He stressed that Iran is

opposed to foreign meddling in Afghanistan, and that the purpose of the conference was not to determine Afghanistan's future, but to assist Afghan authorities in instituting order, which will guarantee the country's security and stability (Fars, October 26).



**The conference of the ministers of foreign affairs of countries neighboring on Afghanistan, held in Tehran. (IRNA, October 27)**

- ▶ The Spokesman of the Afghan Taliban, Zabihullah Mujahid, stated that the Special Envoy of the Iranian President on Afghan Affairs, Hassan Kazemi-Qomi, met in Moscow with a delegation of the Taliban headed by Molavi Abdulsalam Hanafi, the Deputy Prime Minister of the interim government in Afghanistan. According to the statement of the spokesman, in the meeting, which was held on the sidelines of an international conference concerning the situation in Afghanistan, the two sides discussed bilateral relations and decided to conduct additional talks concerning trade, water and electricity in the near future (ISNA, October 21).
- ▶ On October 23, the Iranian Ambassador to Kabul, Bahadar Aminian, met with the Foreign Minister of the Taliban government, Molavi Amir Khan Muttaqi. Aminian stated that the economic problems are a joint challenge of the two countries, and that Iran is willing to invest in the energy, transportation, mining, trade and health in Afghanistan. The Taliban minister of foreign affairs expressed his government's willingness to cooperate with Iran in various spheres and asked Iran to address the needs of the Afghan refugees living within its borders (Fars, October 23).



**The meeting between the Iranian ambassador to Afghanistan and the foreign minister of the Taliban government. (Fars, October 23)**

► The Iranian hardline daily, Jomhuri-ye Eslami, called on Iranian authorities not to recognize the Taliban government. The editorial published by the paper (October 23) argued that Iranian recognition of the Taliban government will be a “mark of shame” for the Islamic Republic and “a strategic mistake,” which will result in severe security problems across all countries of the region. Referring to the international conference held in Moscow to discuss the situation in Afghanistan, the editorial asserted that it is impossible to compare Iran with Russia, which lacks “humanistic principles,” and operates based on material interests alone, and whose senior commanders were partners in the crimes that were committed against the Afghan people during the Soviet occupation of the country. The Iranian daily argued that even if the Taliban were not involved in carrying out the recent attacks on Shia mosques in Afghanistan, the occurrence of the attacks demonstrates that the organization is incapable of securing the country. The editorial also argues that no one is recommending starting a war against the Taliban, but only a government elected in free elections, and one that will guarantee the national security of its neighbors (Iran included), should be recognized by Tehran.