



Spotlight on Iran

December 2, 2021 – December 9, 2021

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Overview

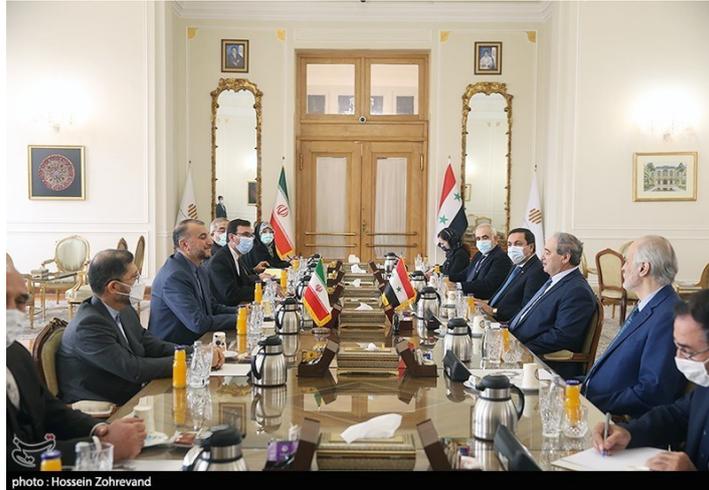
- ▶ For the first time since Ebrahim Raisi assumed the position of President of Iran, the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Faysal Miqdad, arrived for a two-day visit in Iran. During the visit, the foreign minister met with President Raisi and with the Iranian minister of foreign affairs and discussed with them bolstering ties between the two countries, developments in Syria and regional affairs.
- ▶ Against the backdrop of the visit of the Iranian minister of industry and trade in Syria and the opening of the Iranian trade fair in Damascus in late November, senior Iranian officials working in the economic sphere renewed their call to solve the issues hindering the expansion of trade ties between the two countries. The executive director of the Iranian Organization for Trade Development reported that 50 million dollars were allocated to support Iranian companies exporting to Syria.
- ▶ The Iranian ambassador to Baghdad participated in a coordination meeting of the Shia blocs in the Iraqi parliament alongside the leader of the Sadrist current in the Iraqi parliament, Muqtada al-Sadr. The meeting focused on political developments in Iraq and efforts to form a new government following the parliamentary elections, which were held in October 2021.
- ▶ The Commander of the Qods Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Esmail Qa'ani, declared that the greatest defeat of the United States in the current era is its defeat in Afghanistan. Qa'ani threatened that if the Americans do not withdraw from the entire region, they will be expelled from it in a manner even worse than how they were forced to leave Afghanistan.
- ▶ The trade movement between Iran and Afghanistan resumed following the shootout that took place on December 1 between Iranian border guards and Taliban gunmen in Nimrouz

province along the border separating the two countries. The spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Iranian media outlets downplayed the significance of the incident, claiming it stemmed from misunderstanding of the Taliban, who erroneously thought that Iranian farmers infiltrated Afghan territory.

► The UAE's National Security Adviser, Sheikh Tahanun's Ben-Za'ad al-Nahian, visited Tehran on December 6, 2021, for the first time since 2016. He met with senior Iranian government officials, led by Ali Shirkhani, Secretary of the National Security Council, and Dan With them in developments in the region and in relations between the two countries (Tasnim, 6 December 2021). His visit has been part of the rapprochement between Iran and the United Arab Emirates since late 2019.

Iranian Involvement in Syria

► On December 5, the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Faysal Miqdad, arrived for a two-day visit in Iran. This is his first visit to Iran since Ebrahim Raisi assumed his position as Iran's president. During the visit, Miqdad met with senior Iranian officials, chief among them President Raisi and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein-Amir Abdollahian, and discussed bilateral relations, implementations of agreements previously signed between the two countries, and developments in Syria and the region. The Syrian minister of foreign affairs conveyed a letter from President Bashar al-Assad to the president and invited him to visit Damascus. Raisi called for bolstering economic ties between the two countries, condemned the American military presence in Syria and stressed Iran's support for maintaining Syria's sovereignty and territorial unity. During a joint press conference held by the two ministers of foreign affairs, the Iranian minister reported that he discussed with his Syrian counterpart the expansion of economic and trade cooperation between the two countries. He described the relations between Iran and Syria as "strategic and excellent" and added that Iran condemns the presence of foreign forces in Syria who are deployed without coordinating with Syria's government. This presence, he argued, does not serve peace and security in the region. The Iranian minister of foreign affairs added that Iran welcomes the visits recently conducted by senior officials of Arab countries to Damascus, as part of the gradual normalization of relations between these countries and Syria. Addressing the persistent airstrikes attributed to Israel in Syria, Abdollahian proclaimed that the "fake and terroristic regime of Israel" is the source of insecurity in western Asia (Tasnim, December 6).



The meeting between the Iranian and Syrian ministers of foreign affairs.
Source: Tasnim, December 6

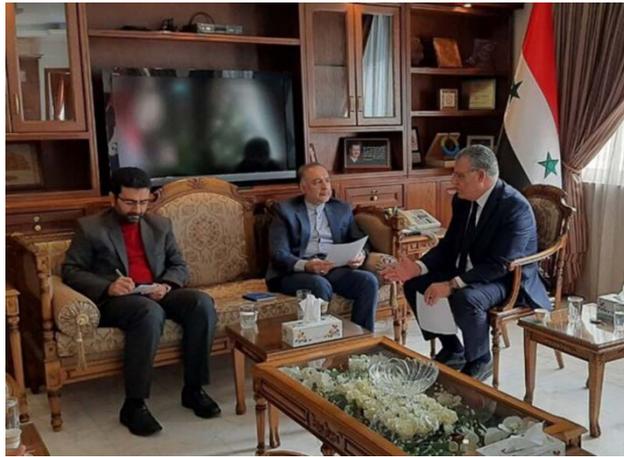
► The Executive Director of the Iranian Trade Development Organization, Alireza Paymanpak, stated that 50 million dollars of the Fund for Expanding Iranian Exports were allocated to supporting Iranian companies that are exporting goods to Syria. In an interview to Iranian TV that focused on the trade ties between Iran and Syria, on the backdrop of the visit of the Iranian minister of industry and trade in Damascus, and the opening of the Iranian trade fair in Damascus, Paymanpak argued that Iran has not utilized the strong political and military ties between Iran and Syria to advance trade between them. He stated that there are good opportunities for Iranian investments in Syria, particularly through the private sector, but also pointed to challenges hindering the expansion of trade between the two countries. According to him, the absence of a fixed maritime route between Iran and Syria is impeding trade between the two nations, because the land route via Iraq is not secure enough. The Head of the Committee on Industry of the Iranian Majlis, Ezatollah Akbari Talarposhti, also stated during the TV program that the solid political and military relations between the two countries should be utilized to expand trade relations between them. He specifically argued for the involvement of the Iranian private sector in these endeavors and called on the government to facilitate the private sector's activities in Syria. The Head of the Joint Iranian-Syrian Trade Committee, Kivan Kashefi, remarked that while the government expects the private sector to play an active role in trade with Syria, the private sector is counting on the government to assist it in solving problems that are holding back their ability to operate in Syria. Two particular challenges raised by Kashefi were the transportation problems and the hinderances to transfers of money due to the economic sanctions placed on Iran and Syria.

Kashefi reported that he offered the government that it would be the private sector that will appoint the Iranian economic attaches to Syria and finance their salaries (IRNA, December 1). In another interview Paymanpak gave the Lebanese TV channel, al-Mayadeen, the director of the Iranian Organization for Trade Development stated that during the visit of the Iranian minister of industry to Damascus, four memoranda of understanding were signed between the two countries concerning expansion of the economic cooperation between the two countries. Among other agreements, the two countries decided to establish a joint trade bank to support the movement of goods and capital between them (Tasnim, December 4).



The Iranian trade fair in Damascus. Source: Mehr, December 3

► On December 1, the Iranian Ambassador to Syria, Mehdi Sobhani, met with the Syrian Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reforms, Mohammad Hassan Qatna, and discussed ways the Iranian private sector could take part in investing in Syria's agriculture and animal husbandry industries. In addition, the two discussed the import of agricultural machinery from Iran, the establishment of agricultural farms and greenhouses in Syria (ISNA, December 2).



**The meeting of the Iranian ambassador to Syria with the Syrian minister of Agriculture.
Source: ISNA, December 2**

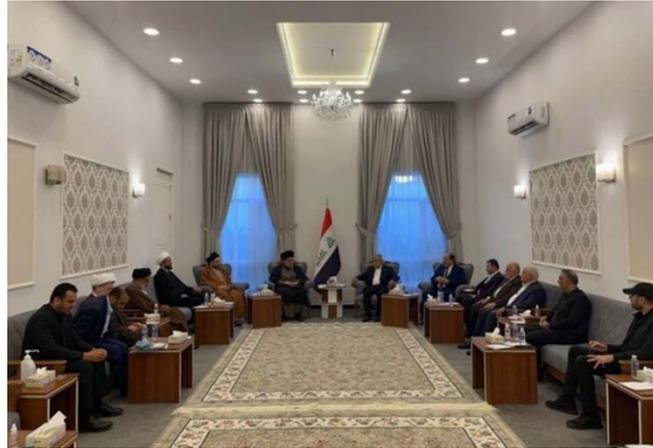
► The Telegram channel of the Fatemiyoun Brigade, an Afghan militia operating under the IRGC's command in Syria published (December 6) photos showing the Commander of the Qods Force's IRGC, Esmail Qa'ani and his deputy, Mohammad-Reza Falahzadeh, during a gathering of the Brigade's fighters. It is unclear when these photos were taken.



The commander of the Qods Force (center) and his deputy (right) in a fathering of Fatemiyoun Brigade fighters. Source: Telegram channel of the militia, December 6

Iranian Involvement in Iraq

► On December 2, the Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad, Iraj Masjedi, participated in a coordination meeting of the Iraqi Shia blocs in the Iraqi parliament, alongside the leader of the Sadrist current, Muqtada al-Sadr. The meeting, which was held in the home of the Chairman of the Fath Coalition, Hadi al-Ameri, was attended by several party leaders and commander of the Shia militias, and discussed developments in Iraq, the ongoing American presence in the country, and the formation of a new government following the parliamentary elections held in Iraq in October 2021 (ISNA, December 2).



The coordination meeting of the Shia parliamentary blocs with Muqtada al-Sadr and the Iranian ambassador to Iraq. Source: ISNA, December 2

► The Representative of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Tehran, Nazim Dabbagh, stated in an interview to the newspaper Hawlati, which is published in Iraqi Kurdistan, that Iran supports the candidate of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) for the Iraqi presidency. He remarked that Iran hopes that the decision concerning the identity of the next president will be accepted by all political parties, and supports maintaining the balance of power between the PUK and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), by nominating a PUK candidate to the Iraqi presidency, and a KDP candidate for the premiership of the KRG. According to him, Iran has no objections that Barham Salih (PUK) will continue his tenure as president of Iraq. Dabbagh's statements were made in response to reports about the visit of a KDP delegation to Iran to secure its support for transferring the Iraqi presidency to a representative of the party. The Representative of Iraqi Kurdistan in Tehran also stated that Iran has a historical role in Iraq, and that all sects in the country, including Arabs and Kurds, are partners in these relationships (Kurdpress, December 2).



**Nazim Dabbagh, the Representative of Iraqi Kurdistan in Iran.
Source: Kurdpress, December 2**

► On December 4, the Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, Iraj Masjedi, met with the Iraqi Minister of Justice, Salar Abd al-Sattar Mohammed, and discussed with him legal issues of relevance to the two countries, including the extradition of convicted criminals and prisoner swaps (IRNA, December 4).



**The meeting of the Iranian ambassador to Baghdad with the Iraqi minister of justice.
Source: IRNA, December 4**

Iranian Involvement in Afghanistan

► The Commander of the IRGC's Qods Force, Esmail Qa'ani, declared that the greatest defeat of the United States in the current era is its defeat in Afghanistan. In a speech he delivered in Shiraz to mark the anniversary of the death of Abdolrasoul Ostovar, a senior IRGC commander, a veteran of the Iran-Iraq War, who died in December 2020 of COVID-19, Qa'ani asserted that the "wily and criminal" Americans who fought in Afghanistan for 20 years,

eventually had no choice but to retreat. For 20 years, they propped up a government that was not able to resist for even 20 days, he said. He declared that the United States still has time to withdraw in humiliation from the region surrounding Iran, and if they fail to do so, they will be expelled from it in a much worse manner than their expulsion from Afghanistan (Tasnim, December 3).



The commander of the IRGC's Qods Force. Source: Tasnim, December 3

► On December 2, the Spokesman of the Iranian Customs, Rouhollah Latifi, announced that the movement of goods in the Milak Border Crossing connecting Iran and Afghanistan resumed after the shootout that took place on December 1 between Iranian border guards and Afghan forces in Nimrouz Province abutting the border dividing the two countries (Mehr, December 2). The Spokesman of the Taliban stated that the incidence stemmed from “a misunderstanding” and added that Taliban authorities issued instructions to prevent such incidents from recurring. Iranian media outlets also downplayed the incident, reporting that Taliban forces mistook the Iranian border guards for Iranian farmers to infiltrated Afghanistan, and this is why they opened fire at them, with led to a fire exchange between the two forces (Tasnim, December 2). The Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Saeed Khatibzadeh, also claimed that the incident between the Afghan and Iranian forces stemmed from a misunderstanding of the Taliban concerning the location of the border line between the two countries (ISNA, December 5).

► The Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, stressed the need to form a broad government in Afghanistan. In a meeting he held on December 5 in Tehran with the deputy chairman of the National Security Council of Kyrgyzstan, Abdollahian asserted that Iran supports the establishment of a government that is inclusive of all ethnic groups in Afghanistan, to ensure the stability and calm in the country (Tasnim, December 5).