



Spotlight on Iran

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Overview

- ▶ On May 8, the Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad, arrived for a visit to Tehran, during which he met with the supreme leader of Iran and the Iranian president. This is Assad's second visit to Iran since the outbreak of the popular uprising and civil war in Syria in 2011. During the visit, Assad thanked the Iranian leadership for their support for Syria and praised Iran's positions on regional issues, including the Palestinian cause.
- ▶ The head of the Iranian-Syrian Joint Chamber of Commerce reported that the volume of trade between the two countries over the past year has grown by 60 percent. He mentioned, however, that the transfer of goods between Iran and Syria through Iraq and Turkey is still facing challenges, and that the sanctions imposed on Syria are further impeding the expansion of trade ties between the two nations.
- ▶ The incoming Iranian ambassador to Baghdad met with the Iranian minister of foreign affairs ahead of the start of his tenure. Mohammed Kazem Al-e Sadegh, born in Iraq's Najaf, will replace Iraj Masjedi, who had served as the ambassador in Baghdad since April 2017.
- ▶ The Iraqi minister of electricity announced that Iran and Iraq reached an agreement concerning the resumption of supply of Iranian gas to Iraq and the settling of the Iraqi debt to Iran for previously supplied electricity and gas. The agreement between the two countries was reached following the visit of a delegation of the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity to Tehran.
- ▶ On April 29, the annual International Qods Day processions were held throughout Iran. In a televised speech delivered on the day, the Supreme Leader of Iran, Khamenei, declared that the developments in Palestine and the region prove the weakness of Israel and the

United States and the commitment of the Palestinian people to continuing the struggle against Israel.

►The Iranian minister of foreign affairs spoke on the phone with the Taliban's foreign minister and expressed concern in light of the recent terror attacks in Afghanistan. He demanded that Taliban authorities take the steps necessary to ensure the security of the Iranian embassy and consulates in Afghanistan.

Iranian Involvement in Syria

►On May 8, the President of Syria, Bashar al-Assad, arrived for a visit to Tehran, which lasted a few hours, during which he met with the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, and with the President of Iran, Ebrahim Raisi. The meeting between the supreme leader of Iran and the Syrian president was also attended by the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein-Amir Abdollahian, and the Commander of the Qods Forces of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), Esmail Qa'ani. This is Assad's second visit to Tehran since the outbreak of the Syrian uprising in 2011, which turned into a civil war. His prior visit took place in February 2019.

►During his meeting with President Assad, the Supreme Leader of Iran, Khamenei, called for deepening ties between Iran and Syria and declared that relations between the two are vital for both nations, and that those ties not only must not be weakened, but should be bolstered as much as possible. He remarked that Syria today is not the Syria prior to the war, and that despite the destruction due to the war, Syria now enjoys much greater respect and prestige than before. Khamenei proclaimed that while some leaders of Arab countries meet with the heads of the "Zionist regime" and drink coffee with them, the people of the region are filling the streets in processions marking International Qods Day, chanting anti-Zionist slogans. In his meeting with Assad, President Raisi declared that what is shaping the future of the region are not negotiation tables and agreements, such as the Oslo and Camp David Accords, but it is the resistance of the people of the region that is determining the new regional order. He pointed to the need to bolster cooperation and coordination between Iran and Syria and remarked that Iran is interested in expanding ties with Syria, particularly in the spheres of the economy and trade. Assad thanked Iran for its support to Syria and stated that the strategic relations between the two countries are the main factor that prevented the "Zionist regime" from taking over the

entire region. He praised Iran's position since the Islamic Revolution concerning regional affairs, and particularly when it comes to the Palestinian cause, which according to him, has proved to the people of the region that this path [of resistance] is the correct one (Tasnim, May 8).

►The website Nour News, which is affiliated with the Iranian Supreme National Security Council, claimed in a commentary published following Assad's visit to Tehran (published on May 9), that the visit of the Syrian president and his meetings with senior Syrian officials proves that no factor can prevent the expansion of strategic ties between the two countries. The commentary also argued that the end of the war in Syria provides new opportunities for expanding cooperation in the spheres of the economy, trade, industry and construction, and that one of the central matters discussed during the visit, was the expansion of economic cooperation between Iran and Syria.



The meeting of President Assad with President Raisi and Supreme Leader Khamenei. (Tasnim, May 8)

►On May 1, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, spoke on the phone with the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Faisal Mekdad, on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, and discussed bilateral relations and developments in the Palestinian arena. The Syrian minister called for expanding cooperation between the two nations in all spheres, and stressed Tehran's support for Syria and its willingness to help it overcome the economic sanctions imposed on it (SANA, May 2).

►In an interview to the IRNA news agency (May 3), the Head of the Iranian-Syrian Joint Chamber of Commerce, Kivan Kashefi, reported that the volume of trade between the two countries has grown over the past year by 60 percent. He explained the rise by pointing to the improvement in the transfer of goods through Iraq, increasing the number of flights

from Iran to Syria, and trade agreements signed by the two countries. He remarked, however, that the transfer of goods from Iran to Syria through Iraq and Turkey is still expensive and complicated, and that the economic sanctions placed on Syria are hindering the transfer of money between the two countries.

►The pro-opposition Syrian outlet, Ayn al-Furat, reported (May 4) that during the past month, Iran removed several officers who worked at the Aleppo Airport, and replaced them with Iranian commanders, in an effort to regain control over the airfield and tighten security there. This followed several recent security incidents, including an event in which an accidental tossing of a hand grenade led to the injury of an IRGC officer, and the killing of an officer with the pro-Iranian Pakistani militia, the Zeynabiyoun, which operates in Syria under IRGC guidance. According to this report, Iran sees great importance in ensuring the security in this airbase, which is used to move Iranian-linked forces in northern Syria.

Iranian Involvement in Iraq

►On May 5, the President of Iran, Ebrahim Raisi, spoke on the phone with the Prime Minister of Iraq, Mustafa al-Kazimi, on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr. Raisi stressed Iran's support for the unity of Iraq and expressed hope that a new government will soon be formed in Iraq (Tasnim, May 5).

►On May 7, Iran's incoming ambassador to Iraq, Mohammad Kazem Al-e Sadegh, met with the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, ahead of the start of his term as ambassador (ISNA, May 8). Al-e Sadegh is replacing Iraj Masjedi in this role, who has served as the ambassador to Baghdad since April 2017. The new ambassador, born in Iraq's city of Najaf, previously served as the deputy ambassador to Baghdad.



The meeting between the Iranian minister of foreign affairs and the incoming Iranian ambassador to Baghdad. (ISNA, May 8)

►Adel Karim, Iraq’s Minister of Electricity, announced that Iran and Iraq have reached an agreement concerning the restart of supply of Iranian gas to Iraq, and the settlement of the Iraqi debt to Iran (Fars, April 29). The agreement between the two countries was reached after the visit of an Iraqi delegation to Tehran, which discussed the issue of the Iraqi debt to Iran for the import of electricity and gas from Iran. On April 30, the Chairman of the Iranian-Iraqi Joint Chamber of Commerce, Yahya Al-e Eshaq, reported that the payment of the Iraqi debt will commence in a number of days. He mentioned that billions of dollars will be transferred to Iran’s public sector through the Iranian Central Bank, and assets worth nine billion dollars will be transferred to the Iranian private sector (Mehr, April 29).

►Seyyed Kamal Hosseini, the Chairman of the Kurdistan Province Chamber of Commerce of western Iran, stated in an interview to the Iranian news agency ILNA (April 28) that the volume of export of the Kurdistan Province of Iran to the Kurdistan region in northern Iraq has dropped by 36 percent over the past year (2021-2022) and stood at 432 million dollars. He mentioned that Turkey is the main competition of Iran in Iraq and the Kurdistan region, and that the volume of Turkish exports to Iraq over the past year reached 18 billion dollars, double the volume of Iranian exports to Iraq.

Iranian Involvement in the Palestinian Arena

►On April 29, the processions marking International Qods Day were held across Iran, for the first time since the outbreak of COVID-19. International Qods Day has been held since 1979 on the last Friday of the month of Ramadan, based on the decision of the leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The event is intended to express the

support of Iran and the Muslim world to the Palestinian cause and the “liberation of Palestine,” and to call for the destruction of Israel and show defiance against the United States and its Arab allies in the region. In a televised speech on the occasion of International Qods Day, the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khamenei, that developments in Palestine and west Asia signal that a new balance of power is emerging that will affect the present and future of Palestine, and that “unbeatable will” has replaced the “unbeatable army” of the Zionists. He further claimed that “the criminal Zionist army” has been forced to move from offense to defense, and that the main backer of the “Zionist regime,” the United States, has suffered great defeats in the international and domestic arenas, and that “the Zionist regime” itself is mired in a myriad of problems in the political and military arenas. Khamenei remarked in his speech, which he delivered in Arabic, that polls indicate that almost 70 percent of the Palestinians in historical Palestine support carrying out attacks against “the Zionist regime,” which indicates the complete willingness of the Palestinians to take on this regime. He added that the incidents in Palestine in recent years have annulled all plans of compromise with the “Zionist enemy,” including the Oslo Accords, the two-state solution, the “Deal of the Century,” all through the power of resistance. He stressed Iran’s support for the resistance camp and the Palestinian resistance, condemned the normalization of relations between Israel and a number of Arab states, and praised the Palestinian martyrs, their families, the Palestinian prisoners and fighters (Tasnim, April 29).



International Qods Day procession in Tehran. (Tasnim, April 29)

►The Commander of the IRGC, Hossein Salami, declared in a speech delivered on the occasion of the International Qods Day, that the Palestinians have realized that it is impossible to strive for security, independence and return to the homeland through a

“piece of paper,” and that there can not be any compromise with the oppressors. He called on the Palestinians to persist in their struggle and declared that Israel is creating the conditions for its destruction and will disappear soon. According to him, the United States can no longer assist Israel, and is like an ambulance that is responding to a call of a patient after he had already died (ISNA, April 29). The Commander of the Qods Force of the IRGC, Esmail Qa’ani, declared in a speech in Mashhad that the life of the “Zionist regime” is coming to an end, and that the “resistance front” is growing stronger day by day. He advised the residents of Palestine to sell their property in the “occupied territories” and return to their homes in Europe before it is too late (Tasnim, April 29).

►On April 27, a Hamas delegation led by a member of the group’s politburo, Khalil al-Hayya, and a senior Hamas official, Osama Hamdan, arrived for a visit to Tehran to participate in the International Qods Day events. On April 28, the delegation met with the Speaker of the Majlis, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, who stressed the importance of the Palestinian cause and Jerusalem to Iran, and its support for the Palestinians. He remarked that the Islamic nation, the resistance groups and the Muslim world must make normalization between the countries of the region and Israel costlier, and that the first priority in addressing the Palestinian question is jihad, resistance and struggle (Tasnim, April 28).



**The meeting between the speaker of the Majlis and the Hamas delegation.
(al-Alam, April 28)**

Iranian Involvement in Afghanistan

► On April 30, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, spoke with the Foreign Minister of the Taliban, Amir Khan Muttaqi. During the call, Abdollahian expressed concern regarding the security of Iranian consulates and the embassy in Afghanistan, in light of the recent terror attacks in the country, and called on Afghan authorities to adopt the necessary security procedures to protect the embassy in Kabul and the consulates in Herat, Mazar-e Sharif, Kandahar and Jalalabad. The Taliban's minister of foreign affairs promised that Afghanistan's security services will protect all Iranian diplomatic offices in the country (Fars, April 30).

► On May 4, another shipment of Iranian humanitarian assistance arrived in Kabul, to be distributed to Afghan civilians. The shipment included food and medicine. A week prior, Iran sent a shipment to Mazar-e Sharif city, which was comprised of 11 tonnes of food and clothes. According to the Iranian consul in Mazar-e Sharif, Seyyed Hassan Yahyavi, the shipment was targeted at families of those killed and wounded in the terror attacks that rocked the city over the past month. Additionally, the consul provided financial assistance to the families of those harmed in the recent attacks (Tasnim, May 4).



The transfer of humanitarian assistance from Iran to Kabul. (Tasnim, May 4)