



# Spotlight on Iran

August 18, 2022 – September 1, 2022

Author: Dr. Raz Zimmt

## Overview

- ▶ On August 21, a senior Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) officer was killed in Syria. The circumstances of the death of the officer, who served in the IRGC's ground forces, were not provided.
- ▶ Iran condemned the American strikes carried out on August 23 against targets belonging to pro-Iranian militias in Deir Ezzor, eastern Syria. The strikes followed an attack using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) carried out on August 15 against the American base in al-Tanf, Syria. The spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs labeled the American strikes as "a terrorist action" and denied any Iranian connection to the targets hit by the United States.
- ▶ A Syrian pro-opposition website reported that a delegation made up of five IRGC commanders arrived in late August to Syria to discuss with commanders of the pro-Iranian militias operating in the country how to respond to the persistent Israeli attacks on their bases in Syria.
- ▶ The Iranian ambassador to Beirut stated in a meeting with the secretary general of the Lebanese Baath Party that Iran is prepared to send fuel oil to Lebanon, if the Lebanese government agrees to this and sends an official delegation to Tehran to discuss the matter. To date, previous such offers were not accepted by the Lebanese government.
- ▶ Against the backdrop of the clashes that erupted on August 29 between armed men affiliated with the Sadrist Current and Iraqi security forces and pro-Iranian militias across Iraq, the Iranian embassy in Baghdad called on Iranian citizens to avoid visiting the cities of Baghdad (including the Kazimayn shrine) and Samara, until further notice. Additionally, the flights from Tehran to Baghdad were temporarily halted, and Iranian pilgrims were asked to

delay their departure to Iraq to attend the Arabaen ceremonies (set to start on September 15).

► On August 29, the Iraqi minister of foreign affairs arrived for a visit in Tehran and met with senior Iranian officials, chief among them the president and foreign minister. The two sides discussed bilateral relations, the latest developments in Iraq and the Iraqi mediation efforts between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

► In a lengthy interview to the official website of the Supreme Leader of Iran, the Commander of the IRGC, Hossein Salami, declared that the current missile and rocket capability in the hands of the “resistance front” is insufficient and ought to be bolstered, alongside the ground fighting capability against Israel. Salami argued that the West Bank ought to be armed as well, and that this process is already ongoing.

## Iranian Involvement in Syria and Lebanon

► On August 21, a senior IRGC officer, Abdolfazl Alijani, was killed in Syria. Iranian media outlets reported that the fallen commander is from the town of Dorcheh in Esfahan Province and served as an officer at the Training Center for Combat Engineering at the Amir al-Mu’mineen University for Science and Technology belonging to the ground forces of the IRGC in Esfahan. He also served as an adviser in the ranks of the IRGC in Syria. The circumstances of his death were not provided in any of the reports (Tasnim, August 22).



**Abolfazl Alijani, who was killed in Syria. (Tasnim, August 22)**

► On August 24, the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) announced that its forces carried out airstrikes against targets of pro-Iranian militias near the town of Ayyash in Deir Ezzor, eastern Syria. The statement reported that the strike was carried out at the order of the president of the United States to protect American forces from attacks by Iranian-backed groups, such as the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) strike carried out on August 15 from Iraq against the American base in al-Tanf, southern Syria. The statement also mentioned that the

strike hit infrastructure facilities used by groups linked to the IRGC. On August 24, the U.S. Department of Defense announced that analysis of the remains of the UAVs that attacked al-Tanf base on August 15 indicates that they originated in Iran (Reuters, August 24).

► The Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Nasser Kanani, condemned the American strike calling it “a terrorist act against popular groups fighting the occupation,” which represents a violation of Syria’s sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. He denied any Iranian connection to the sites hit by the United States. Kanani added that the continued presence of American troops on Syrian soil is a violation of international law and of Syria’s sovereignty, and that they must withdraw immediately. According to him, the United States is using the pretext of fighting terrorism to maintain its occupation (IRNA, August 24).

► Following the American strikes, pro-Iranian militias carried out rocket attacks against two American bases in Deir Ezzor, lightly wounding three American soldiers. In response, American forces destroyed three vehicles and additional military equipment that were used by the attackers. According to CENTCOM, two or three of the pro-Iranian militiamen were killed in that retaliatory strike (Reuters, August 24).

► A Syrian pro-opposition website reported that a delegation made up of five IRGC commanders arrived on the night of August 25 to Syria on a “secret mission.” According to this report, the delegation arrived at the Damascus International Airport using a Mahan Air flight and continued to the area of the Shia shrine of Seyyeda Zainab south of Damascus, to meet senior commanders of the Shia militias in the area. In the first meeting held by members of the delegation, representatives of Lebanese Hezbollah, who operate in the region, were in attendance. Then the delegation traveled to southern Syria, where it also met with commanders of pro-Iranian militias, and discussed the response to the ongoing Israeli attacks on Syria. The delegation left Syria on August 28 after concluding its meetings (Sawt al-Aseema, August 29).

► Syrian official sources reported that throughout 2022, 125,000 Iranian pilgrims have visited Syria. According to data released by the Syrian Ministry of Tourism, some of the Iranian pilgrims entered Syria via a land border crossing, after flying to Beirut on Mahan Air flights, and then crossed Lebanon’s eastern border, while others arrived by air. During the month of July (in time for the ceremonies of Ashoura’), 42,000 Iranian tourists entered Syria for religious purposes. A report by a pro-opposition news website stated that pro-Iranian

militias, which control the border crossings between Syria and Iraq in the Albu Kamal region, oversee the regular entry of convoys of Shia pilgrims from Iran and Iraq, and distribute religious guidance materials to them (Ayn al-Furat, August 20).

► During a meeting with the Secretary General of the Lebanese Baath Party, Ali Hijazi, the Iranian Ambassador to Beirut, Mojtaba Amani, declared that Iran is prepared to send fuel oil to Lebanon if the Lebanese government agrees to this, and sends an official delegation to Tehran to discuss the matter. Hijazi expressed his regret for the refusal of the Lebanese government to accept Iran's offer to provide fuel to Lebanon, despite the energy shortage in the country (ISNA, August 28).



**The meeting between the Iranian ambassador in Beirut with the chairman of the Lebanese Baath Party. (ISNA, August 26)**

► In September 2021, the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, spoke with the former Lebanese Foreign Minister, Gibran Bassil, and stressed his country's willingness to provide oil to Lebanon. He remarked that if the government of traders in Lebanon require oil, Iran is willing to provide it (Tasnim, September 3, 2021). Prior to this, the Spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the time, Saeed Khatibzadeh, clarified that Iran is willing to sell oil not only to Shia traders in Lebanon, but to the Lebanese government as well (Fars, August 23, 2021).

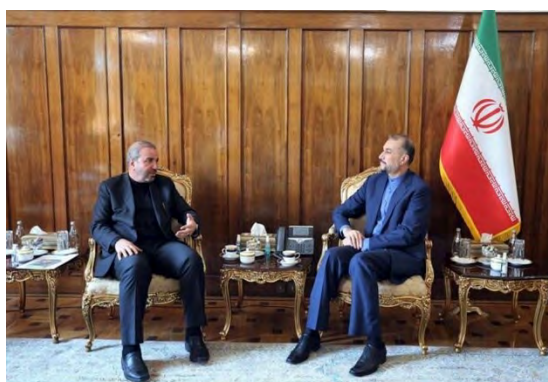
## Iranian Involvement in Iraq

► Following the clashes that erupted on August 29 between armed supporters of the Sadrist Current against Iraqi security forces and pro-Iranian militias in the Green Zone in Baghdad, the Iranian embassy in Baghdad called on Iranian citizens to avoid visiting Baghdad, the shrine compound in al-Kazemiya (northern Baghdad) and Samara, until further notice. Additionally, the Tehran International Airport announced the cancellation of flights from Tehran to Baghdad. The Iranian Ministry of Interior also asked Iranian pilgrims to delay their

departure to Shia holy sites in Iraq on the occasion of Arabeen, marking the end of the 40 days of mourning for the death of Shia Imam Hussein Bin Ali (ISNA, August 29). The clashes broke out after the leader of the Sadrist Current, Muqtada al-Sadr, announced (not for the first time) his resignation from political life. Following this announcement, Sadr's supporters, many of them members of the Sadrist militia, Saraya al-Salam, broken into the presidential palace in the Green Zone and clashed with security forces and pro-Iranian militias in the Green Zone. The clashes lasted for almost 24 hours, until an order by Sadr to his supporters to withdraw from the Green Zone. The clashes had spread to multiple cities across southern Iraq, where Sadrists torched and attacked the headquarters of pro-Iranian militias and parties.

► On August 22, the President of Iran, Ebrahim Raisi, spoke on the phone with the Iraqi Prime Minister, Mustafa al-Kazimi, and discussed with him the ongoing political crisis in Iraq. During the conversation, Raisi stressed the need to maintain Iraq's unity, and asserted that all political currents in Iraq ought to conduct talks to reach an agreement concerning a solution to the country's political problems. Additionally, the Iranian president asked Iraqi authorities to facilitate the arrival of Iranian pilgrims, who are set to arrive to the Arbaeen ceremonies in Karbala, held in mid-September (Fars, August 22).

► On August 22, the Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, Mohammad Kazem Al-e Sadegh, met with the Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, and briefed him on the latest political developments in Iraq. Additionally, the ambassador updated the minister of foreign affairs about the preparations for the ceremonies held for Arabeen, and other issues relating to bilateral relations with Iraq (ISNA, August 22).



**The meeting between the Iranian foreign minister with the Iranian ambassador to Baghdad.  
(ISNA, August 22)**

► On August 29, the Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs, Fuad Hussein, arrived for a visit in Tehran and met with senior government officials, chief among them President Ebrahim Raisi

and Minister of Foreign Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian. During the meeting, the foreign ministers discussed bilateral relations, the latest political developments in Iraq, and the ongoing Iraqi mediation effort between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Abdollahian stressed the need to implement the agreements signed by Tehran and Baghdad that would allow to expand trade and economic ties between the two countries. He declared that Iran sees great importance in maintaining the stability and national unity of Iraq and believes that internal disagreements in the country ought to be resolved through legal means, while preserving the authority of the Iraqi government (Tasnim, August 29).



**The meeting between the Iranian and Iraqi foreign ministers. (ISNA, August 29)**

## Iranian Involvement in the Palestinian Arena

► The Commander of the IRGC, Hossein Salami, provided an extensive interview to the official website of the Supreme Leader of Iran (August 19) following the latest conflagration in Gaza. In the interview, Salami claimed that over the past year, the “Palestinian resistance” was able to expand its struggle against “the Zionists” in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, despite the geographic disconnection between the Strip and the West Bank, and the restrictions and technological means employed by Israel to monitor Gaza and keep it isolated from the outside world. These restrictions have failed to prevent the Palestinians from gaining greater power and developing advanced weaponry. He stressed, however, that the rocket and missile capability in the hands of Hezbollah and the Palestinians are insufficient to liberate the occupied territories, and there is a need to bolster the ground fighting capabilities of these forces, to allow them to defeat Israel through using waves of citizens and military personnel to storm Israel, as Iran did during its war with Iraq in the 1980s, while utilizing the small size and high population-density of Israel. Salami claimed that Israel is growing weaker, and that the Zionists who immigrated to Palestine from

different places, cultures and speaking different languages, are not truly connected to the land of Palestine. He noted that the Zionists are powerful in dealing with conventional armies, but have failed in fighting against jihadist groups, such as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ).



**The Commander of the IRGC, Hossein Salami. (website of the Supreme Leader, August 19)**

► Addressing the latest round of escalation in Gaza, Salami claimed that if the conflict had expanded, all Palestinian factions, including Hamas and Fatah, would have gotten involved. Since PIJ managed to fight the campaign on its own, there was no need for the other groups to intervene, while they did provide a morale boost. He explained that the strategy of the “resistance” is to force the enemy to accept the conditions of the Palestinians through limited and brief battles, and that it has been proven that “the Zionist regime” is incapable of fighting even just one group of the “resistance,” pointing as evidence to Israel’s desire to end the latest conflict. Salami stated that as Gaza armed itself, so can the West Bank, and that this process has already started and is ongoing. He argued that there is no challenge in manufacturing weaponry and moving it from one place to another. He remarked that in his meeting in Tehran with the Secretary General of PIJ, Ziad al-Nakhleh, during the latest escalatory round in Gaza, the two discussed the erosion in the might of the Zionists compared to previous rounds of conflict. Salami proclaimed that the Palestinians believe Israel is waning, its might is eroding over time, and that in the near future, they will be to regain the ownership of their land.

► On August 22, the Iranian Ambassador to Syria, Mehdi Sobhani, met with representatives of the PIJ in Damascus. The statement of the Iranian embassy in Damascus reported that the meeting focused on developments in Gaza and the West Bank and the latest round of fighting in Gaza. In the meeting, the Iranian ambassador praised the “jihadist resistance” for its struggle against “the Zionist regime” (ISNA, August 22).



**The meeting between the Iranian ambassador to Syria with representatives of PIJ.  
(ISNA, August 22)**